DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

September 2005

Project number 3035

STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS SURVEY 2005

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Executive summary

Objective   The Stakeholder Perceptions Survey 2005 aimed to monitor key external stakeholders' attitudes and perceptions of their relationship with the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and, wherever possible, make comparisons with findings from the previous research conducted in 2002.

Method   Seven Departmental Groups nominated stakeholders for inclusion: Schools, Higher Education, Indigenous and Transitions, Science, Vocational Education and Training (VET), Australian Education International (AEI), and the Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group (SAEG).

Phase one of the research involved a quantitative telephone survey of 225 external stakeholders, recruited from DEST's corporate stakeholder database. Interviews were, on average, 15 minutes in length, and were conducted in March 2005. Phase two was qualitative in nature. Sixteen in-depth interviews, averaging between 30-45 minutes in length, were conducted between April and June 2005.

Overall satisfaction   The perceived quality of stakeholder relationships has remained high since the 2002 survey, and appears to be consistently strong across Departmental Groups. Eighty-five percent of respondents gave their relationship with DEST a rating of 7 or above (on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is 'Extremely bad' and 10 is 'Extremely good'). The analogous result in 2002 was 83%, a challenging benchmark upon which to improve. Given the evidence that relationships have deepened, with consequently higher expectations from both parties, this is a good result.

DEST as a source of information   On the whole, stakeholders are of the opinion that information from DEST is readily available, reliable and useful. The Department's responsiveness to requests for information appears to be widely appreciated, and face-to-face contact through forums and meetings is seen to be highly effective.

On-line services are satisfying their users, though they are still something of a niche tool with regard to sustaining key stakeholder relationships.

Nature of relationships

Changes to the way the Department conducts business with stakeholders are having a positive impact. The most commonly reported reason for contact with DEST was 'Networking or general discussion' (76%). This is a telling indication of the nature of current stakeholder relationships, suggesting that a considerable amount of contact occurs with the aim of investing in the relationship itself, encouraging closer links and engaging in dialogue. It is also evidence of the highly personal and interactive nature of relationships for many high-level stakeholders.

Compared to findings reported in 2002, this appears to be an area of considerable change, with 'Networking or general discussion' rising from last place (at 5% in 2002) to first place (at 76% in 2005) as a reason for contact. This is likely to have deepened the quality of relationships, quite apart from affecting the level of satisfaction (which of course is not an end in itself). Indeed, it may be the case that deepening the relationship simply moves the bar higher in terms of satisfaction, by creating higher expectations of that relationship.

An overwhelming majority of key stakeholders have most frequent contact with the National Office (82%) as opposed to State or District Offices. These results most likely reflect the fact that DEST's key stakeholders are operating on the national stage. However, it may well be worth ensuring that the stakeholders whom State and District Offices regard as important for DEST are on the database, and that opportunities for appropriate contact are grasped by the State and District Offices. This will help to avoid any perceptions that DEST is unduly Canberra-centric. This result does throw into further relief the finding that 64% of stakeholders report face-to-face meetings as a typical means of contact, suggesting that the National Office is doing much to encounter stakeholders from diverse locations.

Stakeholders would also welcome greater signs of consistency of communication across Groups and between Offices. Indeed, there may be merit in re-iterating that the *Open for Business charter* applies to all stakeholders, internal as well as external.

Stakeholder relationships are seen to involve a high degree of personal contact, as might be expected given the relative seniority of many stakeholders within their own organisations. In one sense, this can be thought of as a strength of DEST's current approach. In another sense,

however, the highly personal nature of such relationships can present significant challenges. In fact, there exists among stakeholders a degree of concern that corporate knowledge of relationships, which is seen to lie at present so considerably in the hands of the individuals who 'retain their history', can be threatened by staff turnover, particularly in DEST's National Office. Although it was noted that staff rotation is an inevitable feature of any large organisation, some stakeholders question the effectiveness of current procedures for the 'handing over' of relationships between incoming and outgoing staff, resulting in a need to re-explain background situations or retell case histories and a general sense of uncertainty.

Open for Business   The majority of stakeholders (56%) reported that they were unaware of the *Open for Business charter*. There may be merit in re-launching *Open for Business* to key stakeholders because there is evidence that, while DEST staff are bringing the *Charter* to life in their work, it would be a more powerful initiative if more external stakeholders were also aware of the service commitments which DEST staff endeavour to uphold.

On two of the *Charter*'s commitments, DEST has significantly improved on its 2002 performance: namely 'Working to pursue mutual benefits' (67% rating 7-10, compared to 51% in 2002) and 'Helping stakeholders to understand Government policies and programs' (72% rating 7-10 compared to 62% in 2002).

There are no directly comparable commitments on which DEST's performance has decreased. However, there are clear opportunities for improvement on 'clearly explaining how your input will be used' (45%); 'foreshadows the likely effect of future policy direction to stakeholders where relevant' (46%); and 'helping stakeholder organisations to have input into Government policy' (51%). These three commitments are among the priorities for action.

Priorities for action   The highest priorities for action are those attributes on which stakeholders place relatively higher importance and report relatively lower satisfaction. Among the 35 attributes measured, there are four which fall into this category. Two are *Open for Business charter* commitments: 'clearly explaining how your input will be used' and 'helping stakeholder organisations to have input into Government policy'. DEST should investigate the means by which it could deliver greater satisfaction on these attributes. The remaining two are 'being innovative and creative' and 'consulting with stakeholders in the early stages of policy development'. Constant and considered attention

should be given to ensure that everything possible is being done to encourage these tendencies more within the Department.

Balancing these priorities are a couple of attributes on which stakeholders place relatively higher importance and report relatively higher satisfaction. Performance on these attributes is a cause for celebration and DEST should strive to ensure that these levels of satisfaction are maintained. It may also wish to consider promoting these results among stakeholders. DEST's high score on 'being approachable' is particularly noteworthy. There is a strong case for promoting DEST's performance on the *Charter* commitment 'working with stakeholders to pursue mutual benefits' as the qualitative research indicated that this notion captures the imagination of stakeholders as a novel and positive way of thinking about their relationship with DEST, where both parties have something to gain or lose should the partnership succeed or fail.

2

Research context

This section outlines the background to this project and describes the key research objectives.

2.1 Background

The Department's role   The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) plays an important role in ensuring that Australians have the opportunity to make the most of their individual and collective potential. DEST's vision of "a better future for all Australians through learning, science and innovation" recognises that successful education and innovation strategies are key drivers of development, leading to productive and fulfilling lives for individuals, as well as shaping the cultural, economic, and technological landscape of the nation.

DEST supports the Government's priorities in advancing individual and social development through education, science and training. It does this in a number of ways:

- through the provision of policy advice to Government;

- by administering national programs and financial assistance to support higher education, vocational education and training, and science and innovation; and

- by promoting the quality, integrity and export of Australian education, training and science services (in partnership with education authorities of the states and territories).

In performing its role, DEST is accountable to Government, Parliament and, ultimately, the Australian community.

The *Open for Business* approach

DEST's role requires that it develop and maintain sound collaborative relationships with a wide range of external stakeholders. In the broadest sense of the term, DEST's stakeholders are many and varied (ranging from individual students and their parents, to all those working in the education sector, to professional researchers and beyond). However, the key external stakeholders with which DEST has most frequent contact include advocacy bodies, professional associations, community groups and organisations that deliver Government programs under contract.

In order to maximise its effectiveness, DEST aims to build strong, continuing stakeholder relationships. This commitment is most clearly articulated in DEST's *Open for Business charter*, a document that sets out in unambiguous terms a framework for productive stakeholder relationships. The *Charter* is both a set of guiding principles for DEST's internal stakeholders and a forthright declaration to external stakeholders of the standards against which DEST pledges to remain accountable.

The main elements of the *Charter* include a clear description of DEST's commitment to accountability, its role in the effective delivery of Government programs, and the importance it places on engaging productively with stakeholders. A series of eight key points summarises DEST's commitment in relation to such areas as policy development and awareness; open, clear and objective communication; consultation and collaboration; and the growth of trust in relationships. This blueprint clearly provides for inclusive, constructive and interdependent relationships (where both parties have something to gain or lose should the partnership succeed or fail), focused on mutually beneficial outcomes. In turn, this creates a channel for information to flow effectively both from and to Government.

Previous research

A study conducted in September 2002 provided initial data about the period following the release of the *Open for Business charter*. The 2002 results revealed that satisfaction was quite high among stakeholders, with 83% of respondents indicating that their overall relationship with DEST was "good" (7-10 on a 10-point scale). The 2002 results also suggested that a considerably high proportion of stakeholders thought that DEST had either maintained (47% of respondents) or improved (49%) its level of performance in the preceding year.

A number of changes have been implemented since the 2002 study, in order to address areas of concern and to continue to advance relationships. These include:

- the development of a stakeholder database to facilitate ongoing communication;

- the preparation of individual plans targeting specific areas for improvement identified in the market research report at the Group level for DEST; and

- a re-design of the DEST corporate internet website (in progress at the time of the present study).

The need for further research   In line with DEST's commitment to ongoing consultation, a new wave of stakeholder research was undertaken. This research aimed to provide:

- a snapshot of current stakeholder perceptions, as well as a deeper understanding of the factors that influence those perceptions;

- data that will allow DEST to identify any significant trends, through comparison with 2002 benchmark results;

- an opportunity to discover how stakeholders view DEST's performance within the broader spectrum of Government Department services; and, critically,

- data to inform the development of future relationship-enhancing strategies.

2.2 Research objectives

The research had two main objectives:

1. to explore and examine **current stakeholder perceptions**, and compare them with the findings of earlier research; and

2. to **generate actionable strategies** capable of enhancing stakeholder relationships into the future.

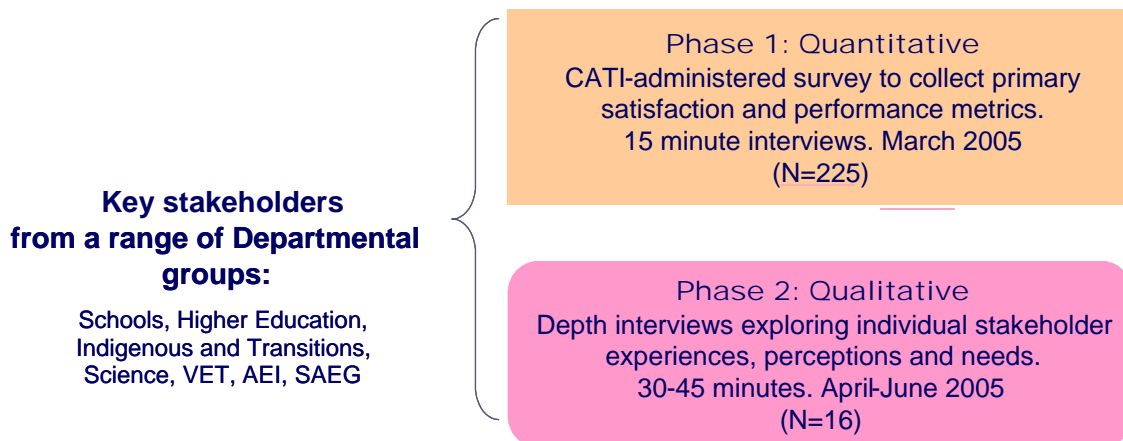More specifically, the following aims were involved.

- Exploring awareness, understanding, attitudes and perceptions of DEST's dealings with its key stakeholders. This included:

- the perceived degree and quality of consultation with stakeholders;

- the extent to which relationships are thought to be "collaborative";

- any differences between stakeholder perceptions of various Departmental areas, including different business groups and the State Office Network (of State and District Offices);

- perceived barriers or obstacles to effective relationships;

- changes in perception that have emerged since 2002;

- DEST's performance in a Whole of Government setting; and

- reactions to changes that have been implemented in light of the 2002 research.

- Measuring the perceived importance of, and level of satisfaction with, DEST's performance in relation to the Open for Business charter, including:

- stakeholders' attitudes to elements of the Charter; and

- the extent to which DEST is perceived by stakeholders to be delivering the key elements outlined in the Charter.

- Comparing the results of this most recent survey to the benchmark data gathered in 2002 to identify any significant trends in perceived performance and stakeholder satisfaction.

The methodology employed to address these issues is detailed in the following section.

3

Research design

This project involved two complementary phases of research: a quantitative survey followed by a series of in-depth interviews. This approach is outlined in the following diagram, and discussed in the sub-sections that follow.

**Key stakeholders
from a range of Departmental
groups:**

Schools, Higher Education,
Indigenous and Transitions,
Science, VET, AEI, SAEG

Phase 1: Quantitative
CATI-administered survey to collect primary
satisfaction and performance metrics.
15 minute interviews. March 2005
(N=225)

Phase 2: Qualitative
Depth interviews exploring individual stakeholder
experiences, perceptions and needs.
30-45 minutes. April-June 2005
(N=16)

3.1 Quantitative survey

The research focused on **key stakeholders** who influence, seek to influence, or actively participate in DEST policy development and/or program delivery. A random sample of **225** of DEST's key stakeholders participated in the first phase of the research.

In this phase, a questionnaire of 15 minutes' duration was administered via Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix A to this report.

A letter of introduction signed by the Departmental Secretary was sent to all identified potential participants before the commencement of fieldwork. A copy of the letter is attached to this report as Appendix B.

3.2 Qualitative in-depth interviews

A series of **16 in-depth telephone interviews** was conducted personally by members of the project team. All interviews were approximately half to three-quarters of an hour in duration. Care was taken to ensure that the diversity of DEST's stakeholders was represented in the interviews.

A comprehensive interview guide for the in-depth interviews was developed in conjunction with DEST. A copy of the interview guide is attached at Appendix C of this report.

3.3 Sample characteristics

Stakeholders were nominated by seven Departmental groups: Schools, Higher Education, Indigenous and Transitions, Science, Vocational Education and Training (VET), Australian Education International (AEI) and the Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group (SAEG). The number of stakeholders nominated by each Group varied, but each Group was represented in the final survey sample roughly in proportion to its size in the population of key DEST stakeholders. The distribution obtained is illustrated in the following chart.
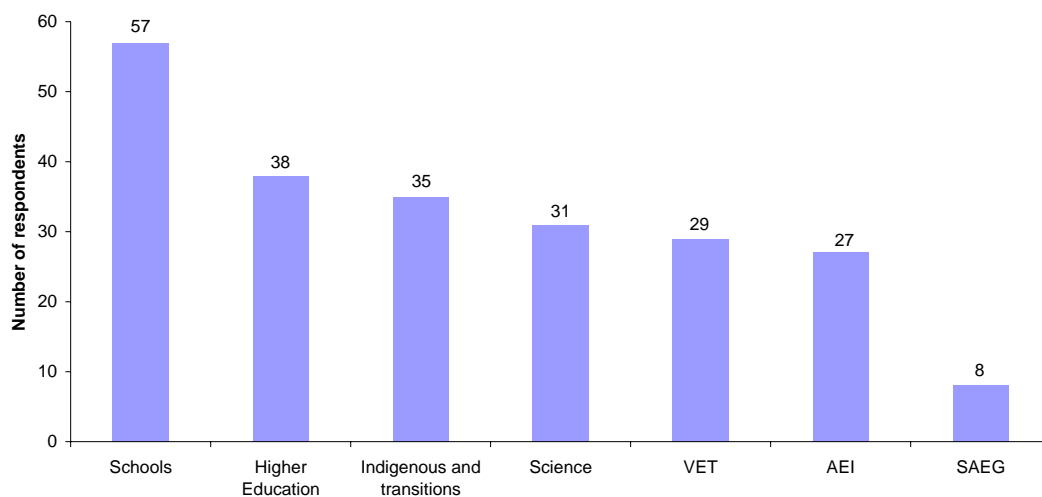
It was common for stakeholders to report having had contact with a number of Groups, and the findings below represent their view of the **overall relationship** they have with the Department. Appendix D presents significant differences in satisfaction ratings according to the Group nominated by each stakeholder in the survey as the Group with which they have most

frequent contact. The most significant finding is that there are **no differences between Groups in overall satisfaction with their relationship with DEST**. The few differences that are to be found, are on particular aspects of the service stakeholders receive.

Stakeholders from all states and territories were included in the research, as illustrated in the following pie-chart.
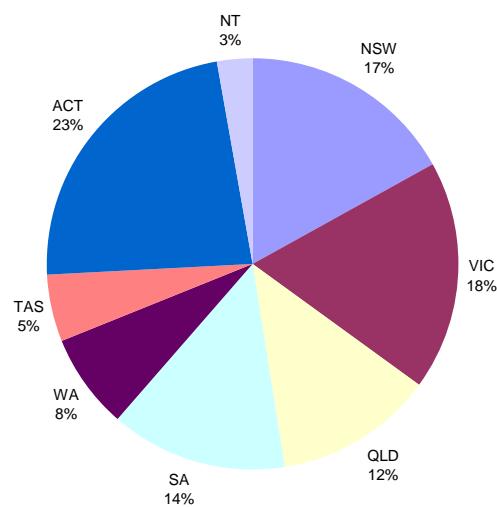
Further discussion of the methodology adopted and technical details related to the conduct of the research are presented in Appendix E of this report.

3.4 Reporting

The remaining sections report the findings from both stages of the research under the following headings:

- overall satisfaction;

- DEST as a source of information;

- nature of relationships;

- general attitudes to DEST;

- Open for Business;

- importance and satisfaction (which includes priorities for action).

Where questions are common to the 2002 and 2005 survey, the findings from each survey are compared. In doing so, it is worth noting we used a 0-10 scale for satisfaction ratings. We believe that the methodological benefits of using a 0-10 scale are overwhelming. The score of 5 is a natural midpoint and always shows a slightly higher frequency than either 4 or 6. Even on a 1-10 point scale, people use 5 as if it were the mid-point, making such scales difficult to interpret. Further, zero is generally seen by both respondents and researchers as more apt for the bottom of the scale. For example, "Extremely dissatisfied" is seen to match a score of zero better than it does "1", because it represents an absence of the property measured by the scale. It also gives the scale ratio properties, in addition to its interval properties.

Given that the 2002 survey used a 1-10 scale for its satisfaction ratings, this creates some minor issues when comparing scores. It is likely that an eleven-point scale, by providing an extra interval at the bottom of the scale, may result in slightly lower ratings. But given the distribution of satisfaction rating for DEST is significantly skewed towards the positive, we think this is unlikely to make a difference of more than a couple of percentage points. Thus, for the purposes of comparing findings, we have adopted a comparable breakdown of the scale to the one used in 2002 (0 to 4= bad or dissatisfied, 5 and 6 = neither good nor bad, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 7 to 10 = good or satisfied). In presenting data in this way, it should be remembered that a rating of 6 (which may be thought to be in the 'good' or 'satisfied' area of the scale) appears in charts in the neutral category. Therefore, results may appear slightly less positive than they in fact are. Alternatively, one can see this coding as appropriate given the better-than-average service standards that DEST sets itself. One of the challenges of conducting tracking research in distinct waves is to achieve an appropriate balance between the accurate reflection of a current situation, while maintaining comparability with past, and future, waves.

4

Overall satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with the Department remains very high. When asked to rate the quality of their overall relationship with DEST 'at the present time', 85% of stakeholders gave a rating of 7 or above (on a scale from 0-10, where 10 is 'Extremely Good'). The following chart displays overall satisfaction levels for both 2002 and 2005.
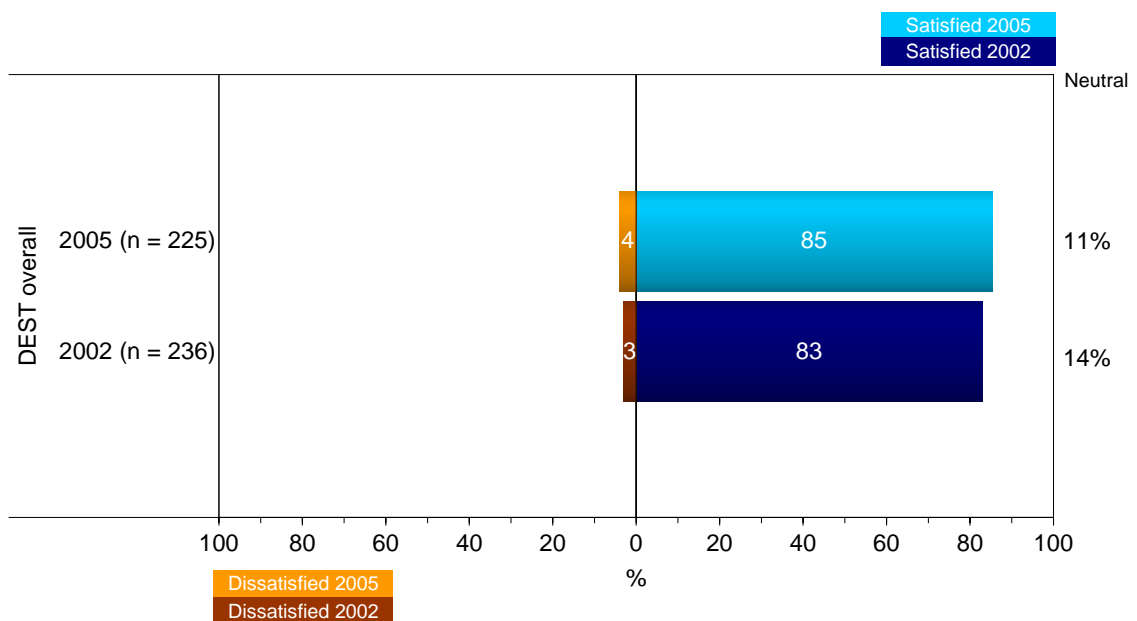
The analogous result in 2002 was 83%, a challenging benchmark upon which to improve. Given the evidence that relationships have deepened, with consequently higher expectations from both parties, this is a good result.
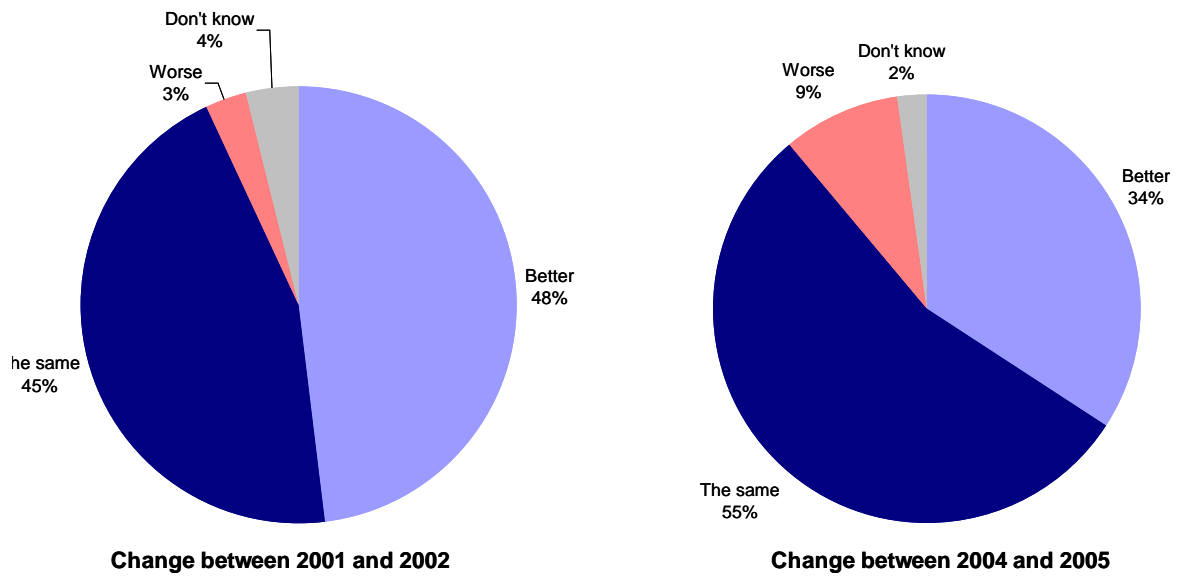
The distribution of scores on this question, charted below, gives another clear graphical indication of the extent to which responses are overwhelmingly skewed in a positive direction.
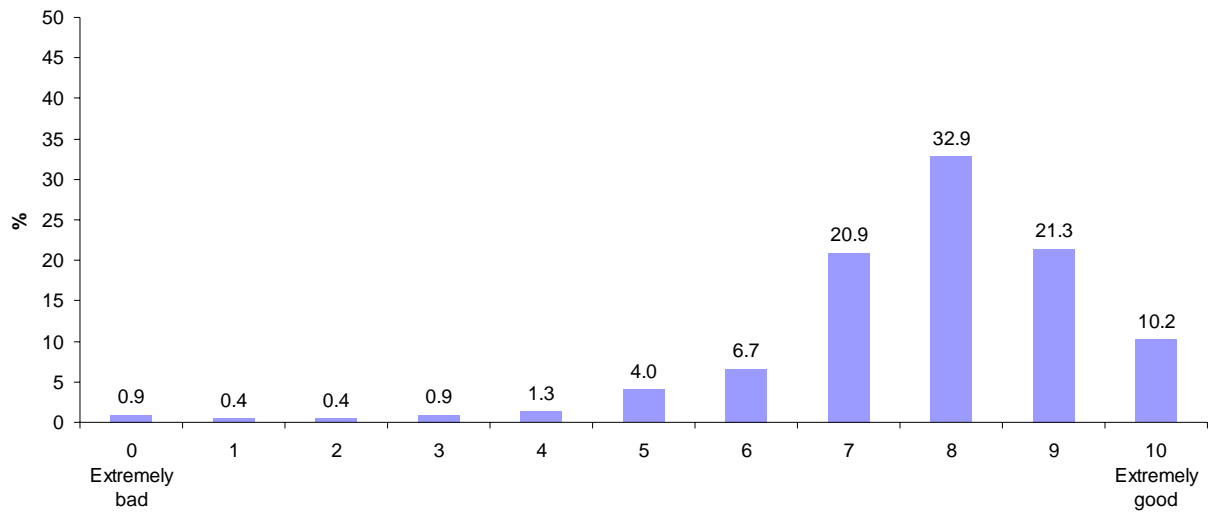
Change over the last 12 months

The majority of stakeholders reported that their relationship had either improved or stayed the same over the last twelve months, with 55% saying that it had "stayed the same", and 34% reporting that they felt it had "improved".

The following pair of pie-charts, charting data from 2002 and 2005, shows that the period of 12 months leading up to the 2002 survey was seen by stakeholders to be a period of greater positive change than the equivalent period leading up to the 2005 survey.

Don't know
4%

Worse
3%

Better
48%

he same
45%

Change between 2001 and 2002

Worse
9%

Don't know
2%

Better
34%

The same
55%

Change between 2004 and 2005

When asked to offer additional comments about their relationship with DEST, many stakeholders were very positive about the current situation. Stakeholders appreciated the effort that they felt had been directed towards strengthening relationships in recent years, and pointed to DEST's openness, willingness to listen, and responsiveness as key features of this development.

5

DEST as a source of information

On the whole, stakeholders are of the opinion that information from DEST is readily available, reliable and useful. The Department's responsiveness to requests for information appears to be widely appreciated, and face-to-face contact through forums and meetings is seen to be highly effective.

Attitudes to information provision

The following chart presents findings in relation to the usefulness of information provided by DEST, and the willingness with which the Department shares information and offers advice.
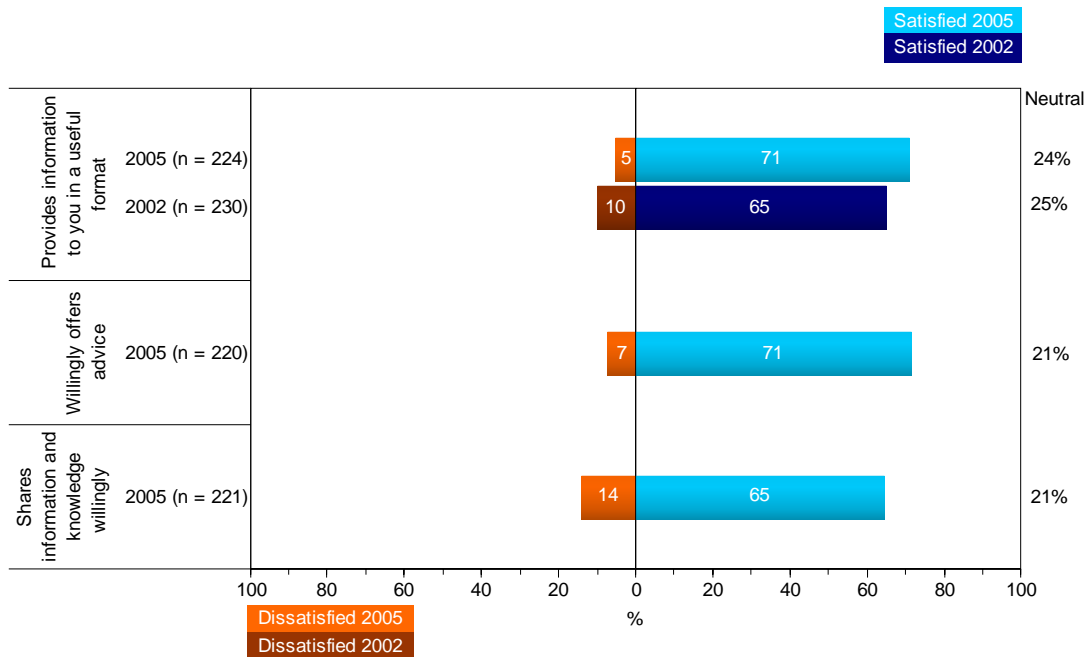
Seventy-one percent of stakeholders are satisfied that DEST provides information to them in a useful format. The same proportion (71%) is satisfied that the Department willingly offers advice, while sixty-five percent of respondents are satisfied that it shares knowledge and information willingly.
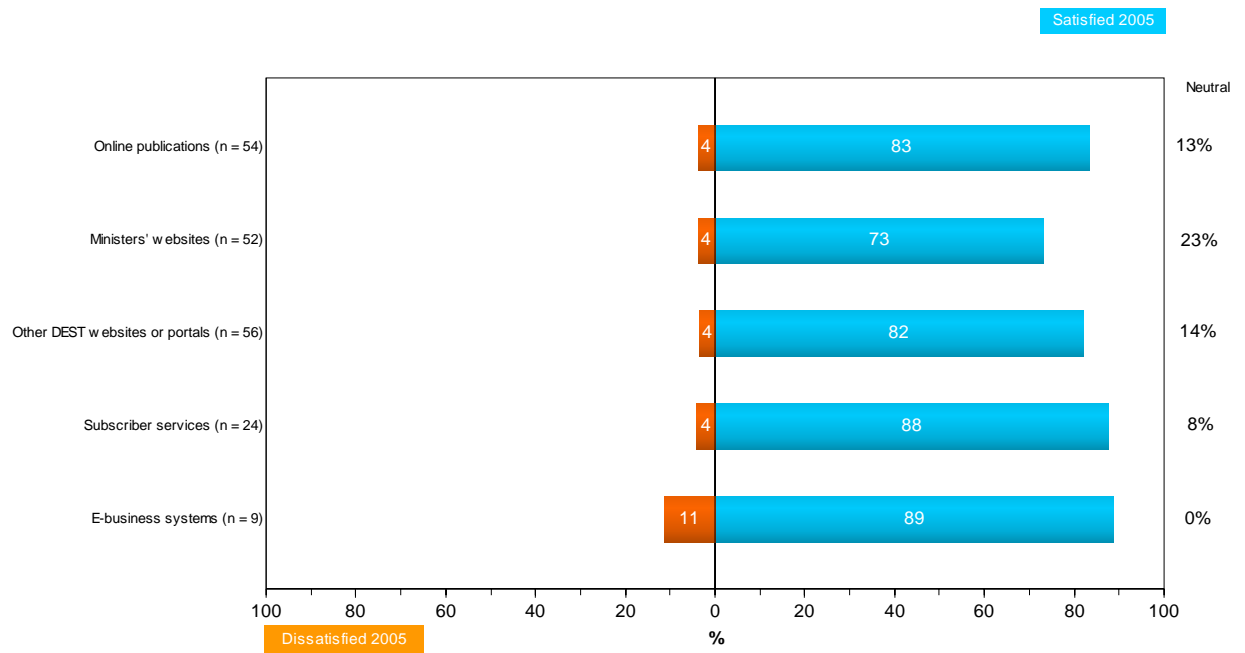
Qualitative findings suggest that the timely supply of information is a key issue for stakeholders, many of whom rely on Departmental data to inform management or business decisions. This was also of concern in relation to changes of policy, with prompt information and advice seen to be essential in guaranteeing stakeholders' ability to meet compliance requirements adequately.

In relation to funding opportunities, some stakeholders suggested that the Department could be more proactive in signalling appropriate opportunities to stakeholders.

On-line services   As has been noted, 32% of respondents indicated that they had regular contact with the Department on-line. These stakeholders were asked to specify which on-line services they have used. The chart below shows the number of respondents who have used each service.

Stakeholders appeared to be reasonably satisfied with the quality of the Department's on-line services, although it should be noted when interpreting the following chart that the results reflect the opinion of relatively small samples (particularly in the case of 'subscriber services' and 'e-business systems').

Satisfied 2005

		Neutral
Online publications (n = 54)	4 / 83	13%
Ministers' websites (n = 52)	4 / 73	23%
Other DEST websites or portals (n = 56)	4 / 82	14%
Subscriber services (n = 24)	4 / 88	8%
E-business systems (n = 9)	11 / 89	0%

100 80 60 40 20 0 20 40 60 80 100

Dissatisfied 2005

%

Qualitative findings indicated that the format in which information is provided on the Department's website was thought to be appropriate, and appreciative comments were offered in this respect. Some criticism of the site centred on the perceived difficulty of finding documents, particularly archived research information and publications, and specific information about research and reviews.
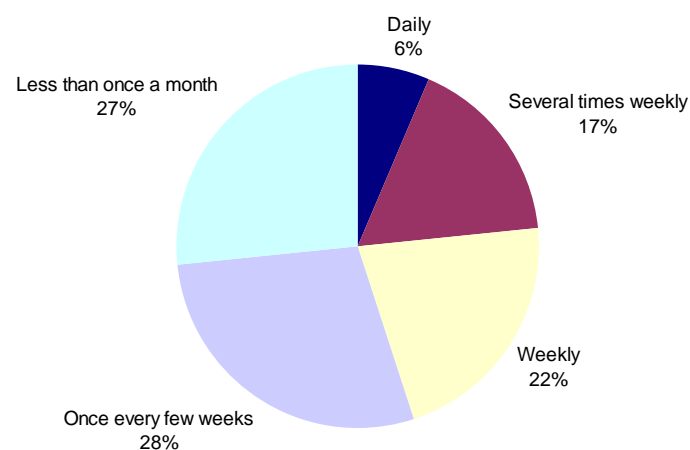
6

Nature of relationships
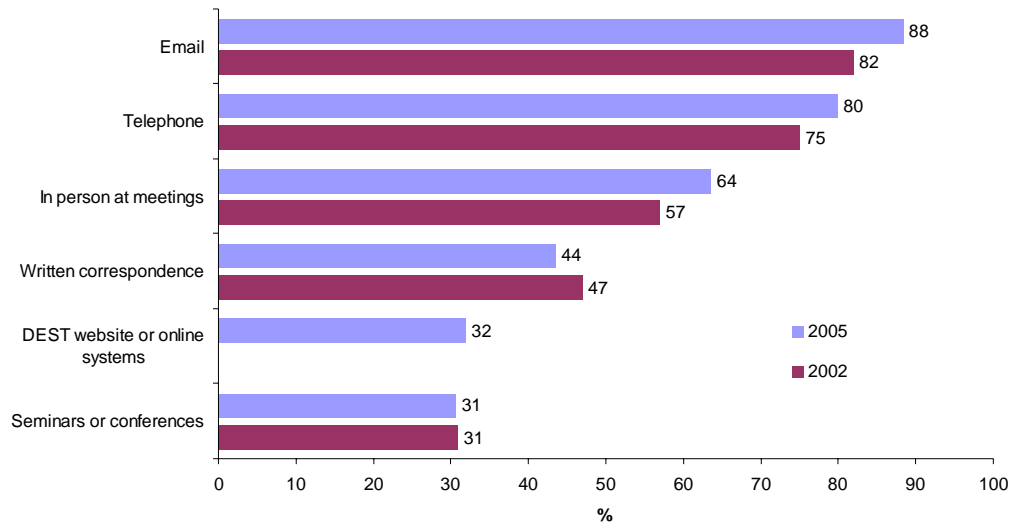
6.1 Contact with DEST

Frequency of personal contact

The following chart indicates how frequently stakeholders have personal contact with DEST.

A minority of stakeholders (27%) reported having personal contact with DEST 'less than once a month'. For 28%, contact occurs 'once every few weeks'. More frequent contact was reported by 45% of stakeholders: 'weekly' (22%), 'several times weekly' (17%) or 'daily' (6%). While these data alone say nothing about the quality of contact, it appears on balance that most stakeholder relationships do involve frequent and ongoing contact – they are not inactive relationships. These proportions are no different to those recorded in the 2002 survey.

Contact channels   The following chart presents comparable 2002 and 2005 data showing the means by which stakeholders typically interact with the Department.


Email (88%) and telephone (80%) were the most commonly reported means of contact. 'In person at meetings', however, was also very common, with almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents saying they typically had contact with DEST in this way. 'DEST's website or on-line systems' was a channel reported by 32% of respondents, and 'seminars and conferences' were a typical channel for 31%. Face-to-face interaction, through meetings and seminars or conferences, clearly represents a sizeable proportion of overall contact. When the extent of telephone contact is also considered, as another relatively direct channel, it appears that contact with stakeholders involves a high degree of personal interaction.

As can be seen in the chart, the relative order of contact channels remains similar to the order discovered in 2002, with no marked differences in the proportion of stakeholders using each channel. (Note that 'DEST website or on-line systems' was not presented as an option in the 2002 survey).

Main reasons for contact   Stakeholders were asked to indicate which of a range of reasons accounted for their contact with DEST, with multiple responses allowed. Results indicate that relationships are characterised by (or motivated by

the desire to achieve and maintain) a high degree of strategic interaction, or contact for the purpose of discussing policy, exchanging ideas and sharing information. The following chart presents reasons for contact in 2005, with comparable findings from 2002.
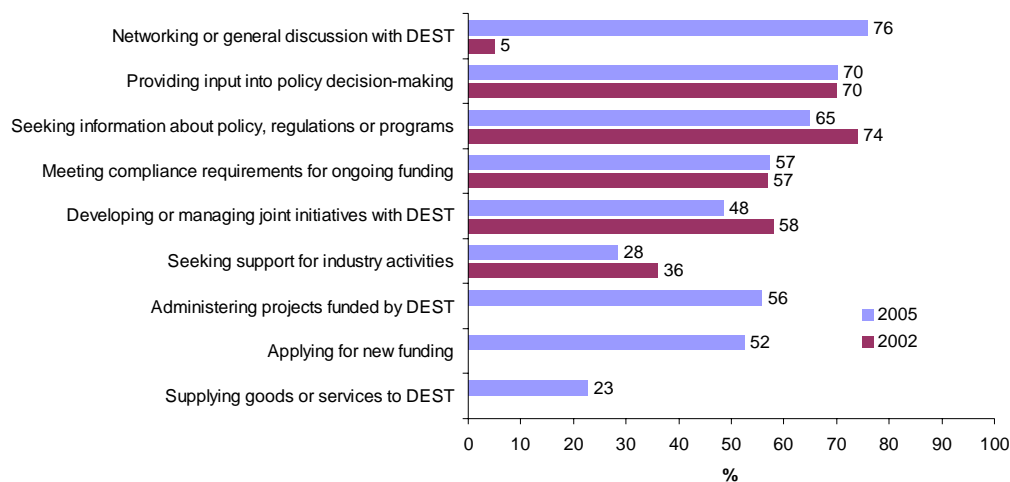
The most common reason was found to be 'Networking or general discussion with DEST' (76%). This is a telling indication of the nature of current stakeholder relationships, suggesting that a considerable amount of contact occurs with the aim of investing in the relationship itself, encouraging closer links and engaging in dialogue. It is also further evidence of the highly personal and interactive nature of relationships for many high-level stakeholders.

Compared to findings reported in 2002, this appears to be an area of considerable change, with 'Networking or general discussion' rising from last place (at 5% in 2002) to first place (at 76% in 2005) as a reason for contact. This is likely to have deepened the quality of relationships, quite apart from affecting the level of satisfaction. It is worth noting that while satisfaction is a desirable goal, it is one of the indicators of the quality of relationships, rather than an end in itself. Indeed, there is reason to suppose that deepening the relationship simply moves the bar higher in terms of satisfaction, by creating higher expectations of that relationship.

It is not simply a case of relationship for relationship's sake. The second most common reason for contact in 2005 was found to be 'Providing input into policy-decision making' (70%), followed by 'Seeking information about policy, regulations or programs' (65%). Administration of programs and initiatives, and funding and compliance-related reasons also motivated much

contact, with a majority of respondents also reporting 'Meeting compliance requirements for ongoing funding' (57%); 'Administering projects funded by DEST' (56%); and 'Applying for new funding' (52%).

Two reasons for contact which have become less common between 2002 and 2005 are 'Seeking information about policy, regulations or programs' and 'Developing or managing joint initiatives with DEST'. In the first case, it may be that information from the Department about policy, regulations and programs has become more readily available in the intervening period, particularly via the website, thereby moderating the need to request it from the Department.

Offices contacted Stakeholder contact with DEST Offices occurs at National, State and Territory, as well as District levels. The following chart shows the percentage of respondents who have regular contact with the Department at each level.
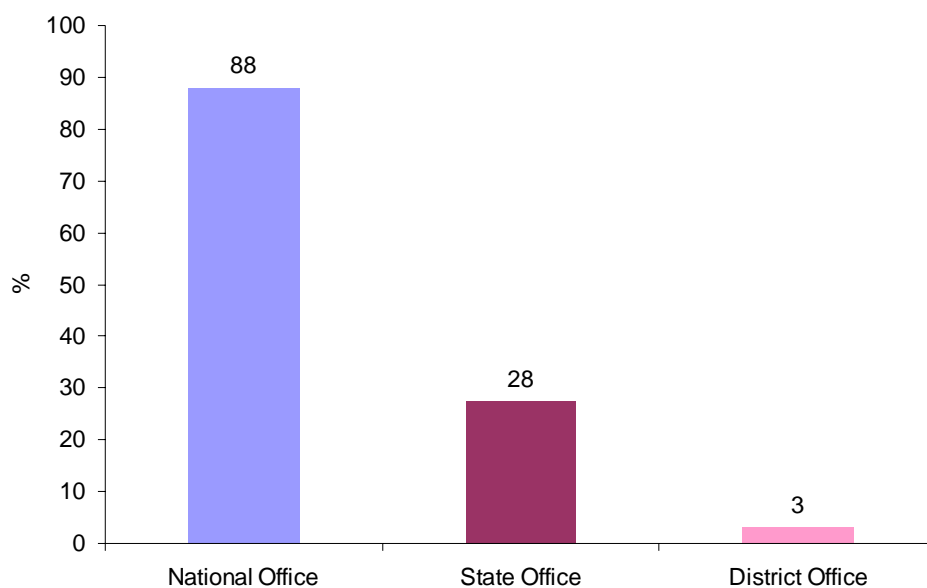
Although stakeholders from all states and territories were included in the sample, the vast majority of stakeholders (88%) reported having contact with the National Office in Canberra, with only 28% reporting contact with their State Office, and 3% with a District Office.

Stakeholders were also asked to indicate with which Office they most frequently had contact in their usual interactions with the Department. As the following chart demonstrates, only a minority of respondents (18%) have most frequent contact with either State or District Offices.
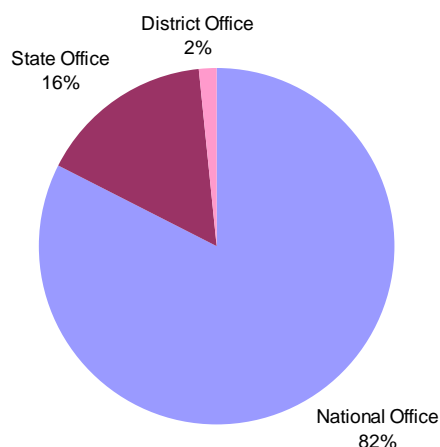
These results most likely reflect the fact that DEST's key stakeholders are operating on the national stage. However, it may well be worth ensuring that the stakeholders that State and District Offices regard as key for DEST are on the database, and that opportunities for appropriate contact are taken by the State and District Offices. The result does throw into further relief the finding that 64% of stakeholders report face-to-face meetings as a typical means of contact, suggesting that the National Office is doing much to encounter stakeholders from diverse locations. It may be important to ensure that staff from State and District Offices are present at such meetings as a means of raising the profile of more local Offices.

Related issues   Although there do not appear to be any significant differences in overall satisfaction between stakeholders who deal more frequently with either the National or more local Offices, a number of issues emerged from the qualitative elements of the study. To an extent, these 'localised' perceptions may be expected to be an inevitable consequence of distance: DEST's national role does, however, require that it listen with equal attentiveness to the views of stakeholders across the country.

There was a perception among some stakeholders that location could play too much of a role in influencing the closeness and effectiveness of relationships. For some, DEST was felt to be too

'Canberra-centric', with stakeholders closer to Canberra believed to have more opportunities to develop better relationships. It was felt by some that National Office should address this by providing additional opportunities for contact to DEST's more remote stakeholders.

For others, there was a degree of concern that centralisation may adversely affect the Department's knowledge and understanding of the state and local environments in which stakeholders operate. It was felt that DEST could display a more nuanced understanding of the different legislative contexts in which stakeholders operate: this was also of particular concern to organisations operating in more than one state.

These concerns appear to be reflected in the quantitative findings. When asked about the even-handedness with which DEST involves stakeholders, a minority of respondents indicated their dissatisfaction.
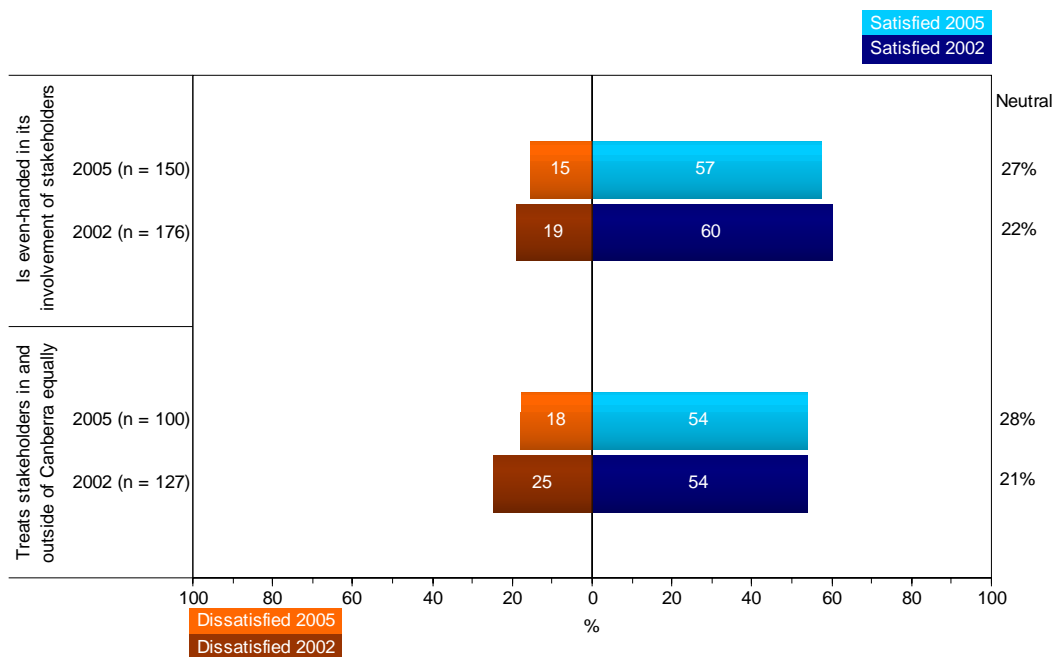
As the chart indicates, a considerable number of respondents chose not to rate these statements. Of those who did, fifty-seven percent expressed their satisfaction that DEST is even-handed in its involvement of stakeholders, with 15% dissatisfied. For a minority of stakeholders, there exists a perception that smaller entities are not always given the consideration they deserve.

When considering involvement on the basis of location, fifty-four percent of respondents were satisfied that DEST treats stakeholders based in and outside of Canberra equally. Stakeholders in remote and rural areas, however, would urge the National Office to remain attentive to local differences when administering funding processes and seeking policy input. Stakeholders would welcome evidence of DEST gaining on-the-ground knowledge of their local circumstances.

State Offices were favourably mentioned by a number of stakeholders, and appeared to some extent to play an important role as intermediaries between stakeholders and the National Office. A number of stakeholders spoke of the significance of their state manager in facilitating relationships with the National Office. Others were equally positive about the role of State Offices, going so far as to suggest increased devolution of responsibilities.

Given that only 28% of respondents reported having regular contact with State Offices, these comments reflect the opinion of a small (though important) minority. This reinforces the need to investigate whether there is room for greater stakeholder contact at more local levels, or whether in fact the corporate database is adequately reflective of the stakeholder population from the perspective of local Offices.

For others, better communication between State and National Offices was seen to be an area capable of improvement. Stakeholders would also welcome greater signs of consistency of communication across Groups. Indeed, there may be merit in re-iterating that the *Open for Business* charter applies to all stakeholders, internal as well as external.

Groups contacted On average, stakeholders have contact with two Departmental groups. Although the nature of their operation may dictate that stakeholders belong primarily to one of these groups, the degree of contact across groups suggests that relationships are not exclusive. The chart below shows the percentage of respondents who report having regular interaction with each group included in the survey.
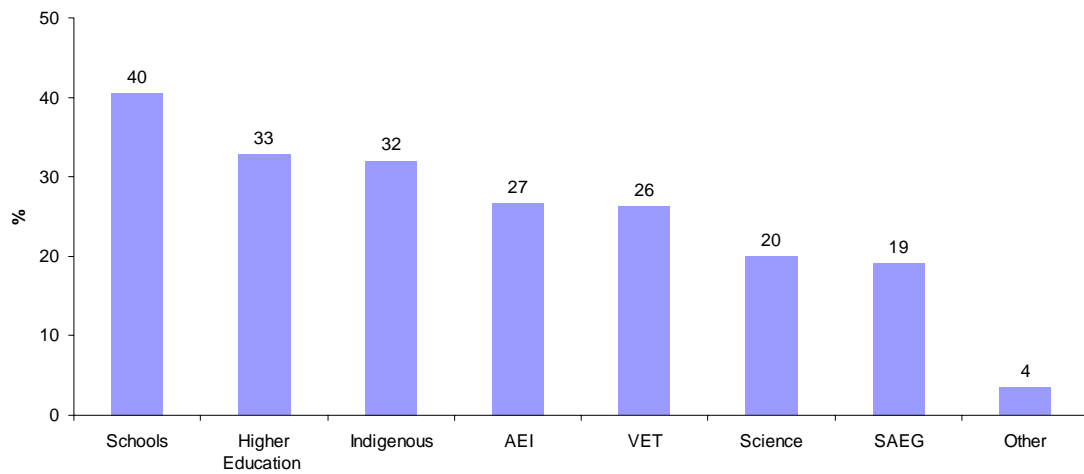
The following chart shows the distribution of stakeholders according to the Group nominated by each stakeholder in the survey as the Group with which they have most frequent contact.
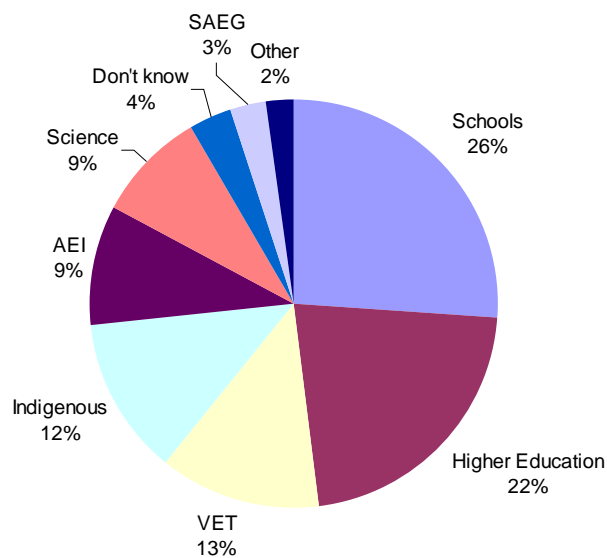
6.2 Contact with DEST staff

Staff contacted   Stakeholders typically interact with DEST staff at a variety of levels in the organisational structure, as evidenced by the following chart, which shows the percentage of stakeholders dealing regularly with staff at each of four levels.
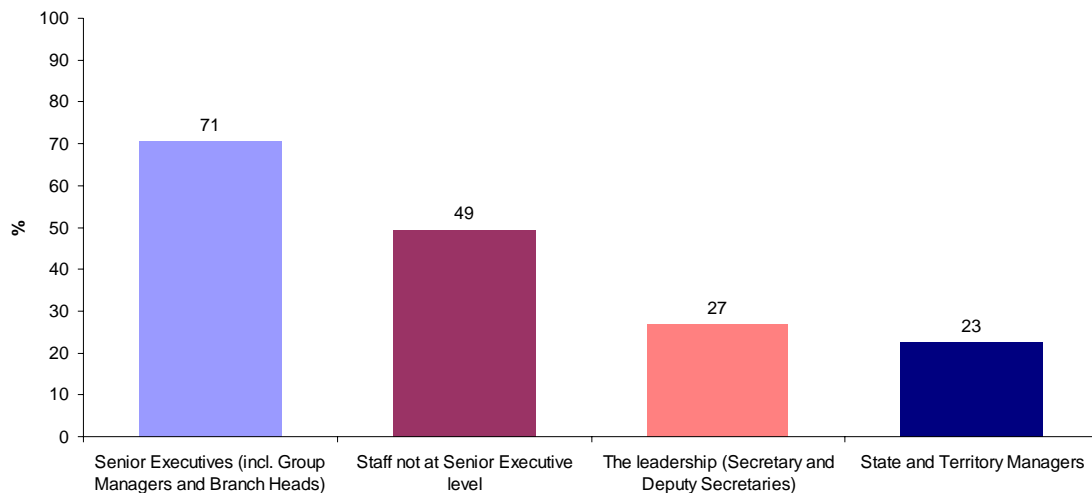
Contact with the upper levels of the Department is common. Seventy-one percent of the sample reported having regular contact with staff at the Senior Executive level (including Group Managers and Branch Heads), with just over a quarter (27%) indicating that their usual interactions with the Department involved contact with the Departmental Secretary or Deputy Secretaries. Forty-nine percent of respondents have occasion to deal with staff at levels below that of the senior executive. (No comparable data exist from the 2002 survey.)

Satisfaction with staff   Stakeholders were asked to rate their satisfaction with a number of attributes related to staff and the ease with which they may be contacted. The following chart presents results for the three such attributes.
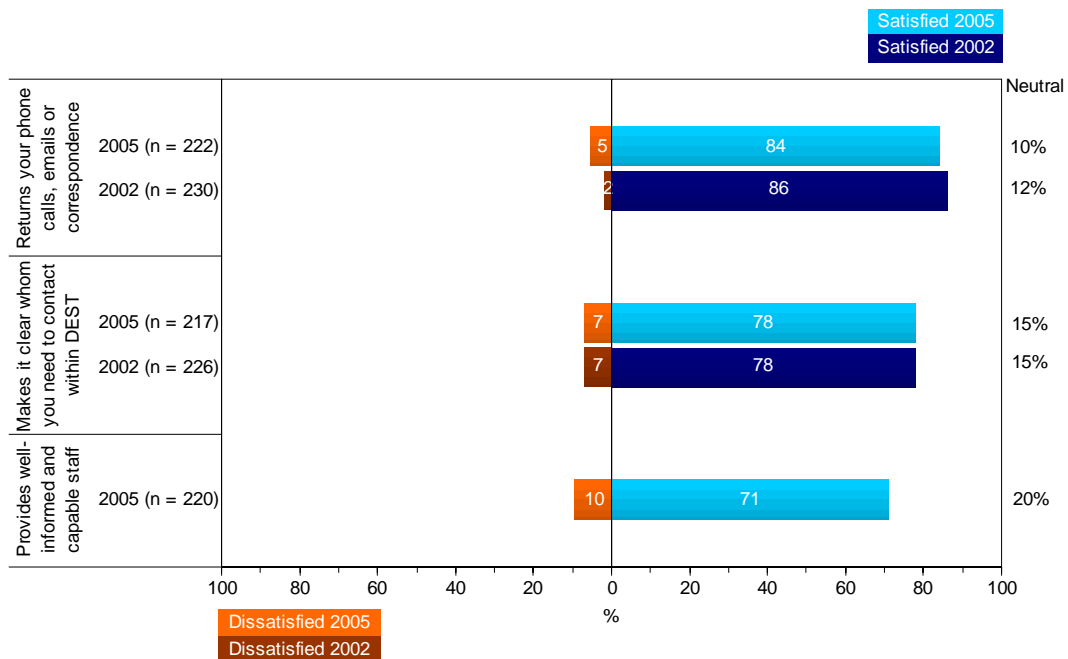
Stakeholders are highly satisfied that DEST returns their telephone calls, emails or correspondence, with 84% giving a rating of 7 or above in this area. There are, however, instances in which this is not the case, with 5% of respondents dissatisfied, and further anecdotal evidence from the qualitative phase suggesting that for a handful of stakeholders more reliable performance in this area is desired. Although dissatisfaction is low on this measure, it may be worth focusing some attention on further improvement in this area.

The vast majority of stakeholders (78%) are also satisfied that DEST makes it clear whom within the Department they should contact. Once again, the results are similar to those encountered in 2002, with less than ten percent of respondents indicating their dissatisfaction.

When asked to indicate their satisfaction in relation to DEST's provision of well-informed and capable staff, 71% of stakeholders gave high ratings, with ten percent of respondents expressing dissatisfaction.

Stakeholders were also asked to rate the quality of their relationships with DEST staff at different levels of seniority. The results are most encouraging. The great majority of stakeholders rate the quality of their relationships with staff very highly, a fact which is clearly illustrated in the chart below.

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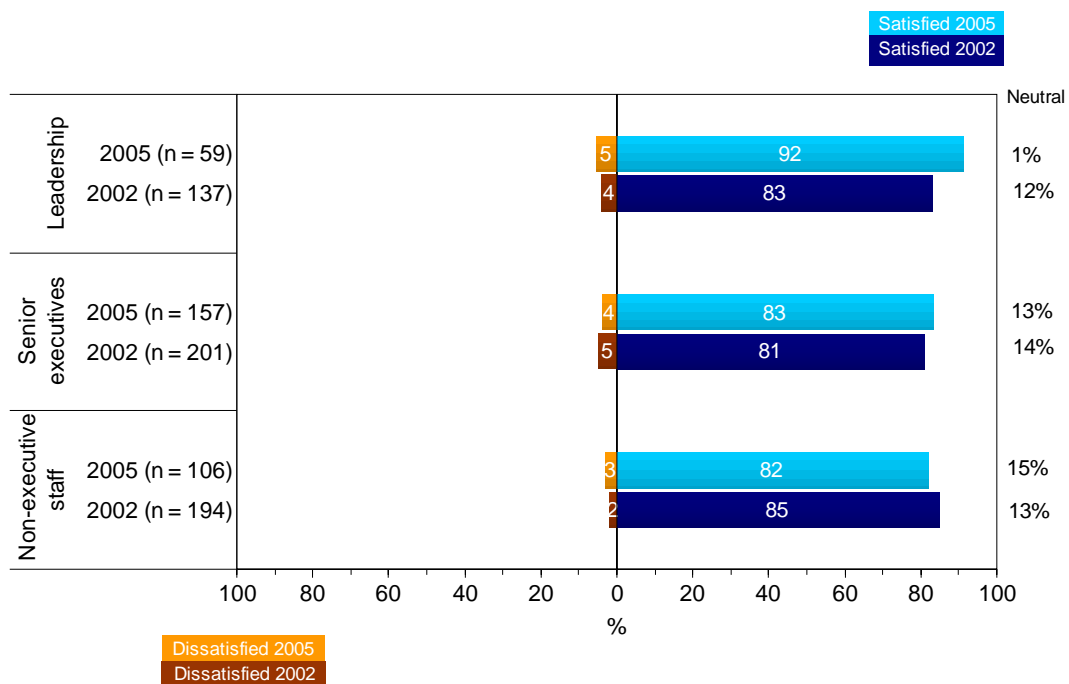
Qualitative findings confirm the high degree of satisfaction evidenced by these figures. In particular, stakeholders commented on the responsiveness of staff to their queries and problems, as well as the ease of developing relationships with staff, who were perceived to be honest and approachable.

Relationships with staff   Stakeholder relationships are seen to involve a high degree of personal contact, as might be expected given the relative seniority of many stakeholders within their own organisations. In one sense, this can be thought of as a strength of DEST's current approach. In another sense, however, the highly personal nature of such relationships can present significant challenges. In fact, there exists among stakeholders a degree of concern that corporate knowledge of relationships, which is seen to lie at present so considerably in the hands of the individuals who 'retain their history', can be threatened by staff turnover, particularly in DEST's National Office. Some stakeholders are not convinced that adequate corporate processes are in place to guarantee the continuity and consistency of relationships in what they feel to be the all too likely event of staff rotation.

When asked to offer additional comments about their relationship with DEST, around eight percent of stakeholders said that they had noted a high degree of staff turnover, and that a lack

of consistency over time affected, or had the potential to affect, the quality of relationships. In fact, of all spontaneous responses to the survey, this was the most common.

Although it was noted that staff rotation is an inevitable feature of any large organisation, some stakeholders question the effectiveness of current procedures for the 'handing over' of relationships between incoming and outgoing staff, resulting in a need to re-explain background situations or retell case histories and a general sense of uncertainty. In addition, some stakeholders noted that staff may be moved to areas for which they are not always adequately prepared.

A number of stakeholders suggested that it would be helpful to have designated stakeholder 'case managers'. Such an approach would also allow for a more formal hand over from one case manager to another, with recognition that the new officer may need to seek advice from the old officer during a suitable period of transition.

7

General attitudes to DEST

7.1 DEST's attitude and conduct

When considering a range of attributes related to the manner in which DEST conducts itself, stakeholders continue to be highly satisfied. The Department is overwhelmingly seen to be courteous, respectful of confidentiality and approachable, as the following chart demonstrates.
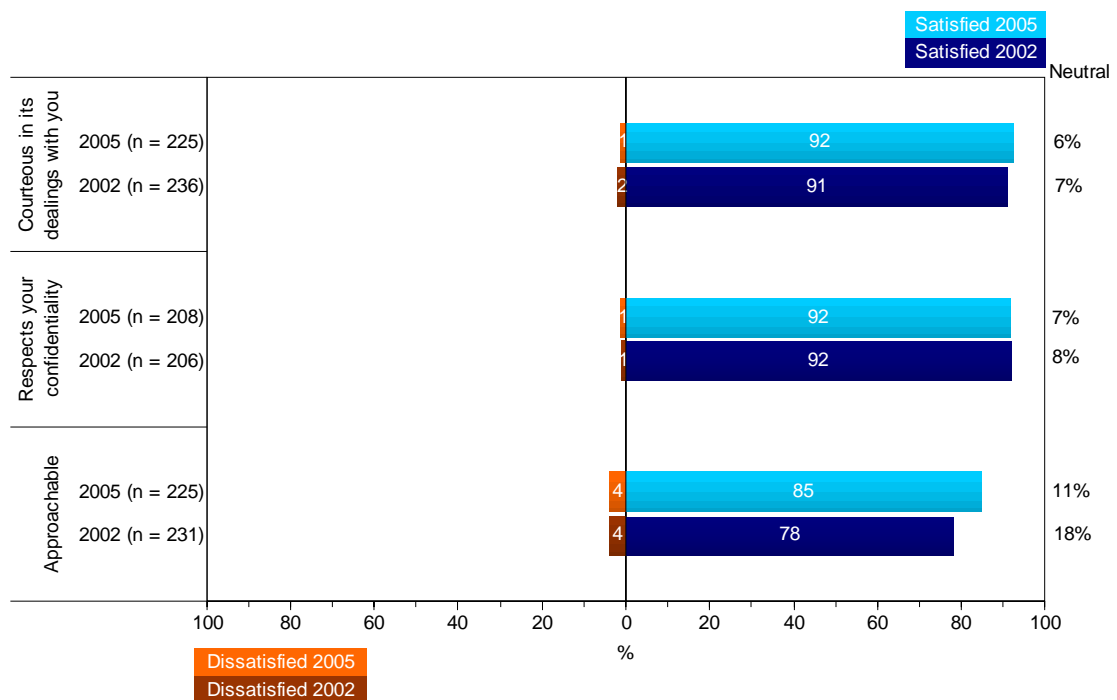
Some of the highest satisfaction scores were recorded in this area, with 92% of stakeholders satisfied that DEST is courteous in its dealings with them and respectful of their confidentiality. Stakeholders are also overwhelmingly satisfied that the Department is approachable.

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STRATEGIC RESEARCH
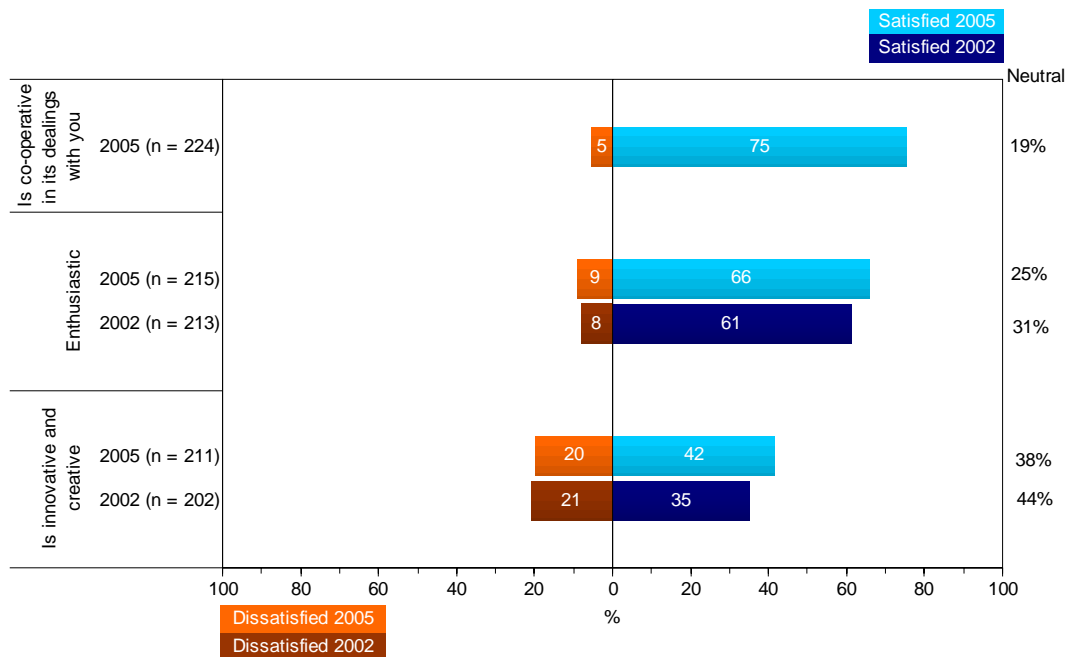
On the question of cooperativeness, fewer stakeholders were satisfied, but the result is still highly encouraging at 75%, as can be seen in the chart above. Two thirds of respondents (66%) were satisfied that DEST is 'enthusiastic', a similar proportion to 2002 (61%). On one other attribute, however, the stakeholders themselves are less than enthusiastic. Only 42% of stakeholders were prepared to give high ratings in response to the statement that "DEST is innovative and creative". The extent to which it is appropriate for the Department to innovate or create, given its administrative role, may seem a matter for some debate. However, as discussed below (under Section 9 'Priorities for action'), the relatively high importance of this attribute in the eyes of stakeholders, combined with relatively low satisfaction, suggests there is an opportunity for improvement.

7.2 Understanding and valuing stakeholders

Stakeholders were asked to rate their satisfaction with a range of attributes relating to the way in which DEST understands, values and responds to the needs of its stakeholders. The following chart presents results on four such attributes.
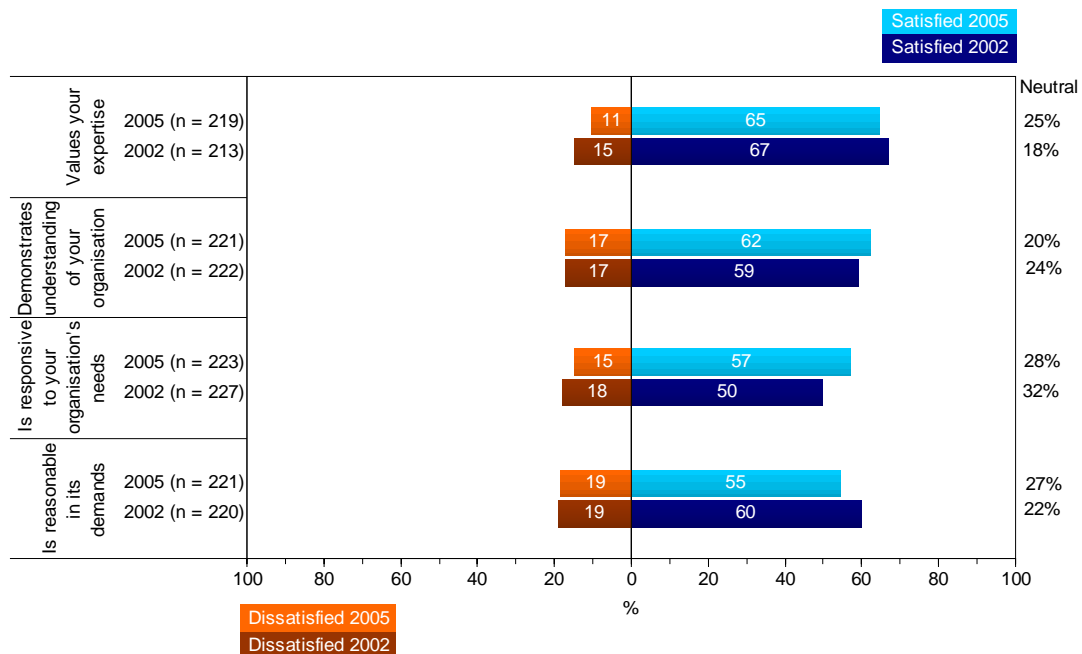
Although satisfaction ratings are encouragingly high, this is an area in which stakeholders are slightly less positive. Almost two-thirds of stakeholders (65%) are satisfied that DEST values their expertise. Almost as many (62%) rate DEST highly in demonstrating understanding of their organisation. On the question of whether DEST is responsive to their organisation's needs, however, and reasonable in its demands, fewer stakeholders are satisfied (57% and 55% respectively).

From the qualitative research, it was clear that some stakeholders believed that DEST did not understand the nature of the stakeholder's role in a peak organisation.

That only 55% of stakeholders are satisfied that DEST is 'reasonable in its demands' may have much to do with administrative and reporting requirements, which are seen to be a substantial (and increasing) burden by a number of concerned stakeholders.

Efforts to streamline reporting requirements, where feasible, are likely to be well received by stakeholders. Where this is not practicable, it may well be worth communicating clearly to stakeholders the value of the data they provide, ensuring that stakeholders are informed well in advance of relevant deadlines, and attempting as far as possible to provide feedback that not only allows stakeholders to benefit from aggregate information, but reassures them of the importance of their input.

7.3 Consultation

On measures associated with consultation, particularly on those related to policy development and implementation, stakeholders tend to be less positive. The chart below presents quantitative findings on four related statements.
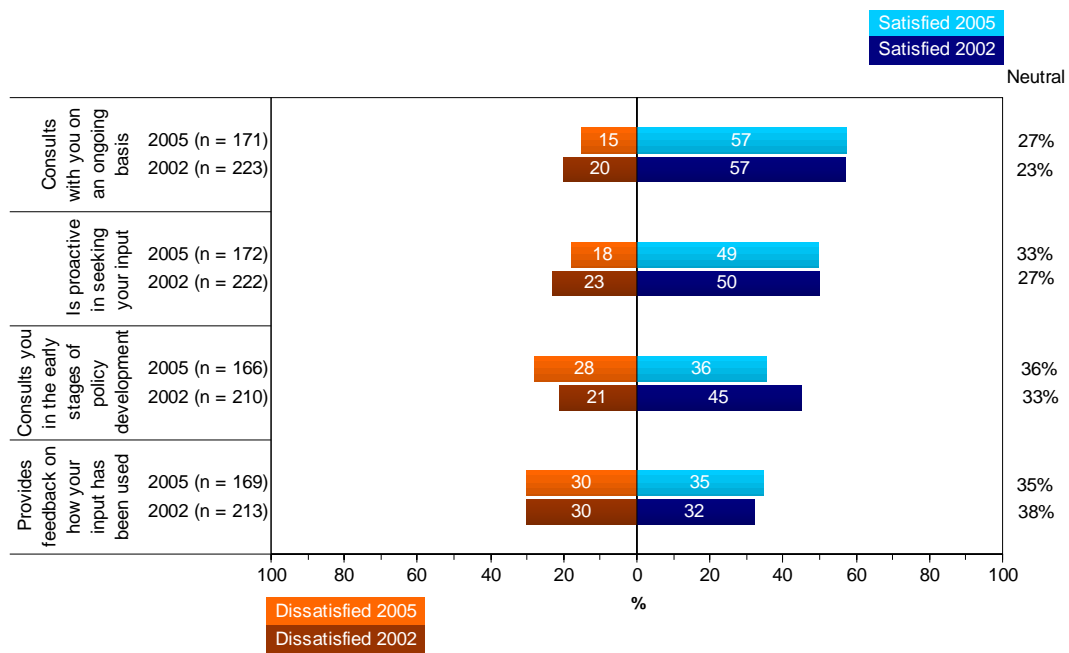
A majority of stakeholders (57%) are satisfied that DEST consults with them on an ongoing basis. This is not true of the statement that 'DEST is proactive in seeking your input', with just under half (49%) satisfied. On early involvement in the consultation process and providing feedback on how stakeholders' input has been used, satisfaction scores are lower, at 36% and 35% respectively. More stakeholders appear to be actively dissatisfied in these areas.

Consultation was a recurrent theme in qualitative components of the research. In particular, stakeholders focussed on the timeliness of consultation, stressing the importance not only of frequent and early involvement (and early notice of the Department's intention to consult), but also of the need to presage likely future developments as far as is reasonably possible. Stakeholders wished to remind the Department of the consequences unexpected policy shifts can have on their own organisations' forward planning, and the importance of understanding not only the educational but also the commercial contexts in which they operate. The way in

which the consultative process is run was also felt to be of concern, with some stakeholders highlighting the fact that realistic timelines are an essential element of sound consultation.

A number of stakeholders questioned the extent to which consultation actually brought about results. Stakeholders are sufficiently realistic not to expect that decisions will be made during discussions with them. Nevertheless, there was a view expressed that while the formal avenues for consultation appeared to have increased, in some cases significantly, it was often doubtful whether discussion led to action.

Such views reinforce the importance of providing feedback on how stakeholder input has been used. Stakeholders acknowledge that their input is not always going to translate into policies with which they are in full agreement, but in order to accept outcomes, they would like to see evidence that their views have been taken into consideration, even if it is only to know the grounds on which they have been rejected.

By explaining the rationale for a lack of action, the effect of negative outcomes on stakeholder relationships can be minimised. Indeed, such outcomes may be seen as a 'moment of truth', an important opportunity for open communication.

Some stakeholders were of the opinion that consultation had improved, and were satisfied with their 'integration' into decision-making processes.

7.4 Transparency and accountability

In an area closely related to consultation, stakeholders were asked to rate their satisfaction with the Department's openness and accountability. The results for three statements are presented in the chart below (these statements were introduced for the first time in the 2005 survey).
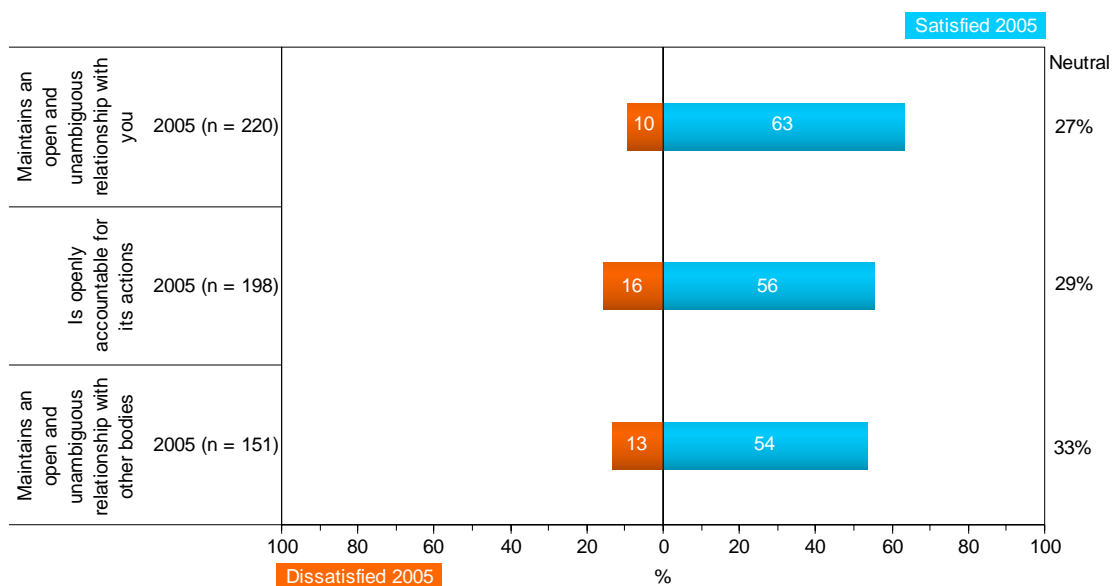
The results show that the majority of stakeholders is satisfied in this area, with a sizeable percentage giving middle scores, and a smaller minority dissatisfied. Stakeholders were most satisfied with the Department's performance in maintaining an open and unambiguous relationship with them: nearly two-thirds of respondents rated their satisfaction as high on this question. Fewer stakeholders were convinced that the Department is openly accountable for its actions, with 56% giving a positive rating, and 16% indicating dissatisfaction. It may be that concerns raised above, about the extent to which stakeholder input clearly translates into considered outcomes, are associated with this perception.

When asked to indicate how satisfied they were that DEST maintains open and unambiguous relationships with other organisations, only 150 out of 225 survey participants felt they were in a position to give a response. Of those who did, a majority of 54% was satisfied, with 13% not satisfied that such relationships were open and unambiguous.

7.5 Collaboration and Whole of Government approaches

Stakeholders responded to two statements about DEST's performance in working collaboratively. While two-thirds of respondents were satisfied that DEST 'works

collaboratively with individuals', fewer (52%) were satisfied that it 'works collaboratively with other Government departments', as can be seen in the following chart.
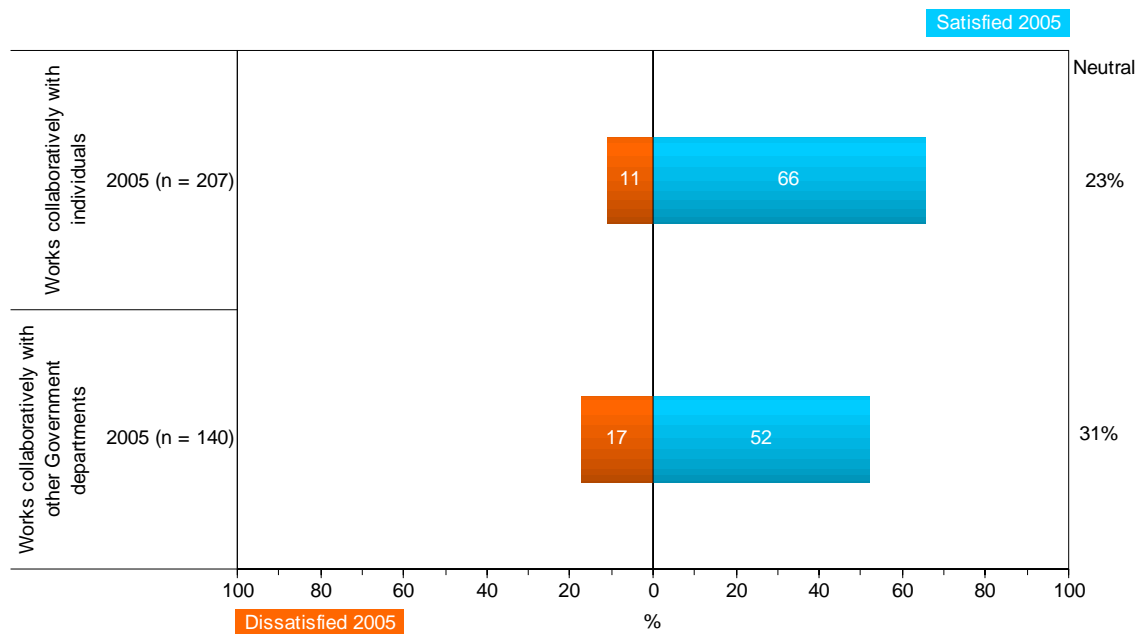
Whole of Government approaches

Once again, many respondents chose not to give an opinion on the extent to which they feel DEST works collaboratively with other Government departments. The ratings of those who did respond suggest that Whole of Government approaches are still in need of improvement. This idea is supported by qualitative evidence, with Commonwealth-State relationships perceived to be an area in which considerable gains have yet to be made. As has been noted in Section 3 (Contact with DEST), the view exists that DEST could do more to liaise not only with its own State Offices, but to demonstrate further its understanding of the state contexts in which its stakeholders operate, and the requirements imposed on stakeholders by state jurisdictions. Stakeholders also made the point that improved cross-government coordination is important in ensuring the place of education as an important export.

The majority of stakeholders praised the Department on collaboration, highlighting the extent to which they felt DEST, as a Department, to be open, accountable, productive and co-operative.

8

Open for Business

Awareness of the *Open for Business charter* appears to be low, with 56% of stakeholders reporting that they were unaware of the *Charter*.
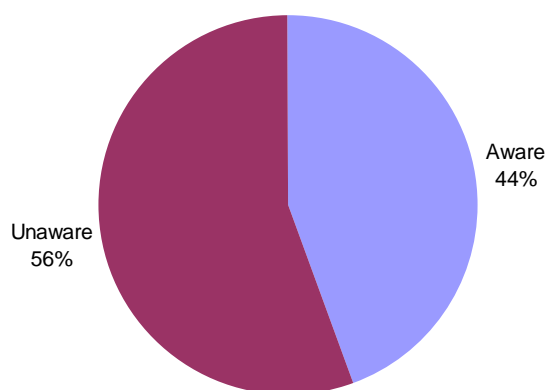
There may be merit in re-launching *Open for Business* to key stakeholders because there is evidence that, while DEST staff are bringing the *Charter* to life in their work, it would be a more powerful initiative if more external stakeholders were also aware of the service commitments which DEST staff endeavour to uphold.

In addition to the attributes discussed elsewhere in this report, many of which relate to the general ethos described by the *Open for Business charter*, eight statements directly related to the *Charter* were measured in the survey (although it should be noted that these attributes were not explicitly linked in the survey to the *Open for Business charter*). Responses to comparable statements show that the Department has maintained, and in some cases improved, its performance against the *Charter* commitments. There appears, however, to be room for further improvement in some areas. The following is the first of three charts in this section that present stakeholders' ratings for these statements.

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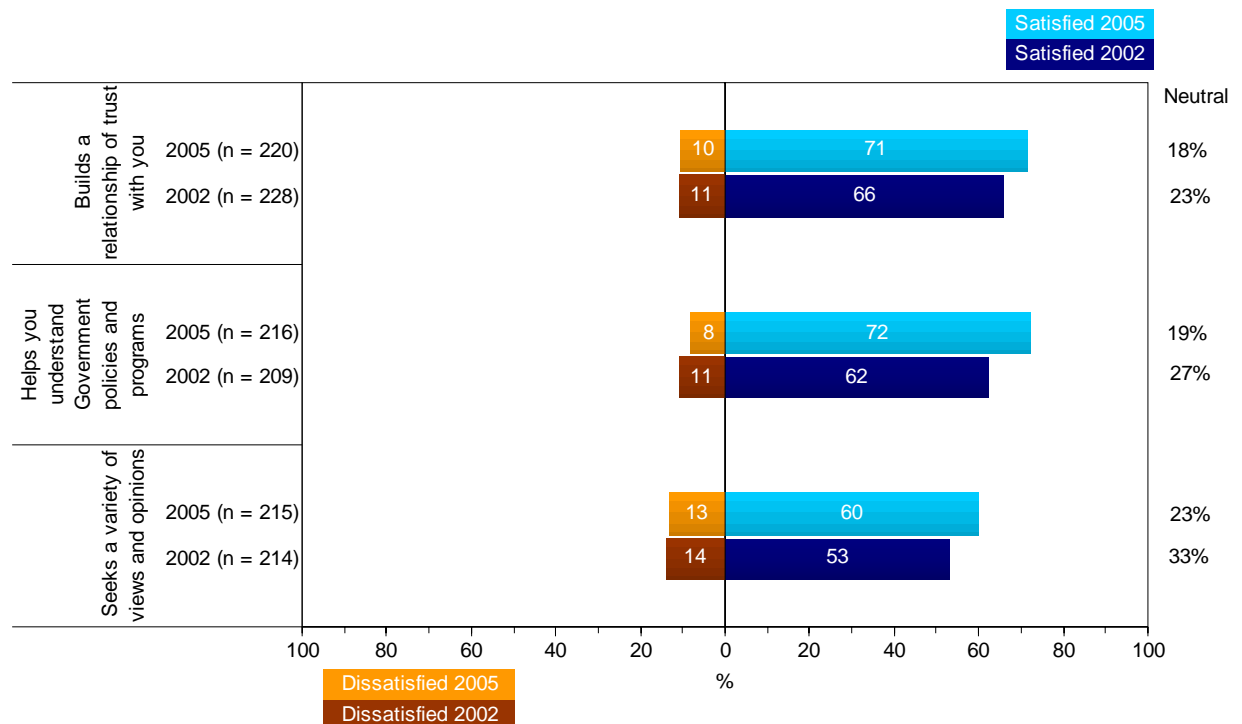
The most positive response was recorded for DEST's ability to help stakeholders understand Government policies and programs, with 72% of stakeholders satisfied on this count. This finding can be read in conjunction with the positive findings encountered earlier in relation to DEST's provision of information to stakeholders (Section 4), and suggests that the Department is performing well in relation to the first of its *Charter* commitments. It is an area in which the Department appears to have improved, with satisfaction up from 62% in 2002.

Also positive is stakeholders' response to the statement that DEST 'builds a relationship of trust with you'. Seventy-one percent of stakeholders express their satisfaction on this attribute. Sixty percent of respondents indicated their satisfaction with DEST's performance in 'seeking a variety of views and opinions', with almost a quarter (23%) neutral.

The following chart presents three other *Charter*-related statements for which comparable findings exist from the 2002 survey.
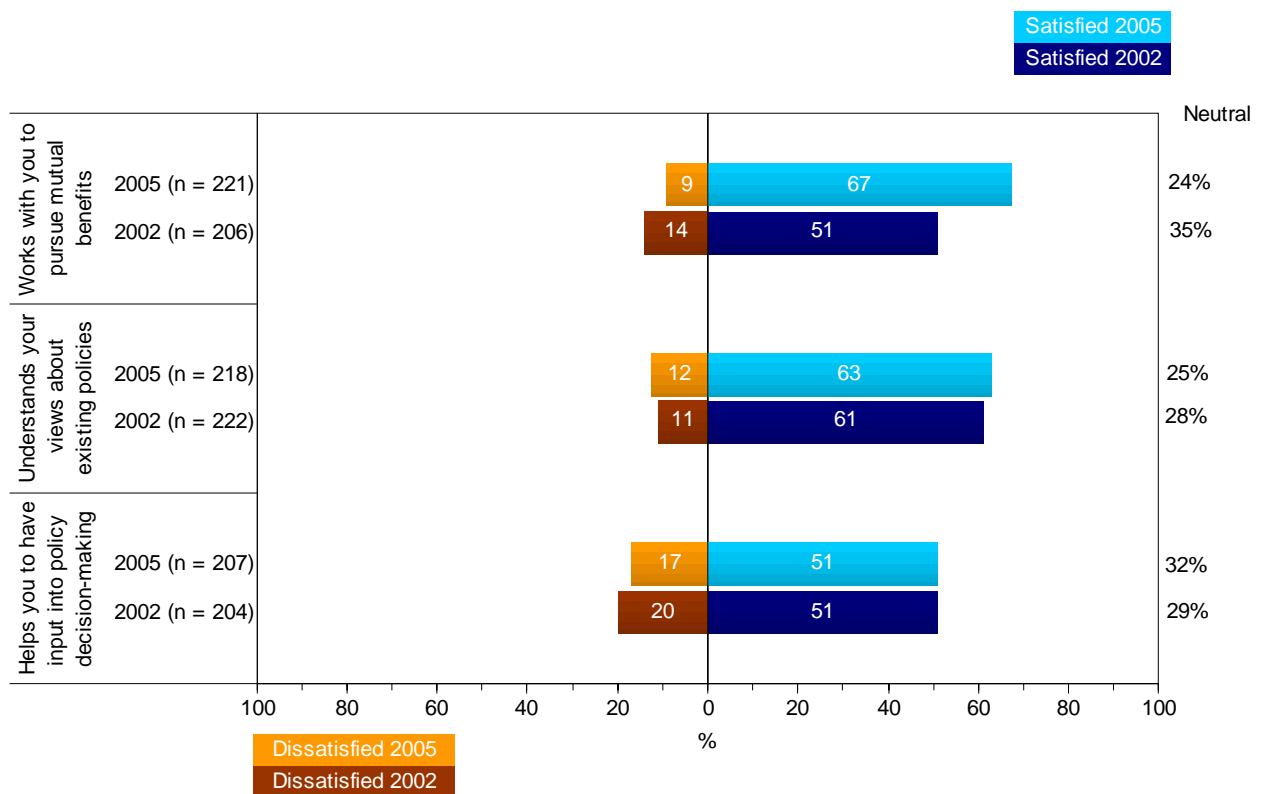
Another area in which satisfaction appears to have increased markedly involves the Department's ability to work together with stakeholders in identifying and pursuing 'mutual benefits'. Just over half of respondents (51%) were satisfied on this point in 2002 compared to 67% in 2005.

Sixty-three percent of stakeholders were satisfied with DEST's performance in 'Understanding stakeholders' views about existing policies', with 25% giving neutral ratings. In line with the findings reported under 'consultation', the statement 'Helps you to have input into policy decision-making' is less positive. Just over half of respondents are satisfied on this measure, with nearly a third (31%) neutral. Seventeen percent of stakeholders are dissatisfied.

In addition to the statements already discussed, two other statements related to the *Charter* were presented to stakeholders. These statements are presented below along with statements from 2002 which refer to the same *Charter* commitments but are sufficiently different in emphasis to be treated as separate measures.
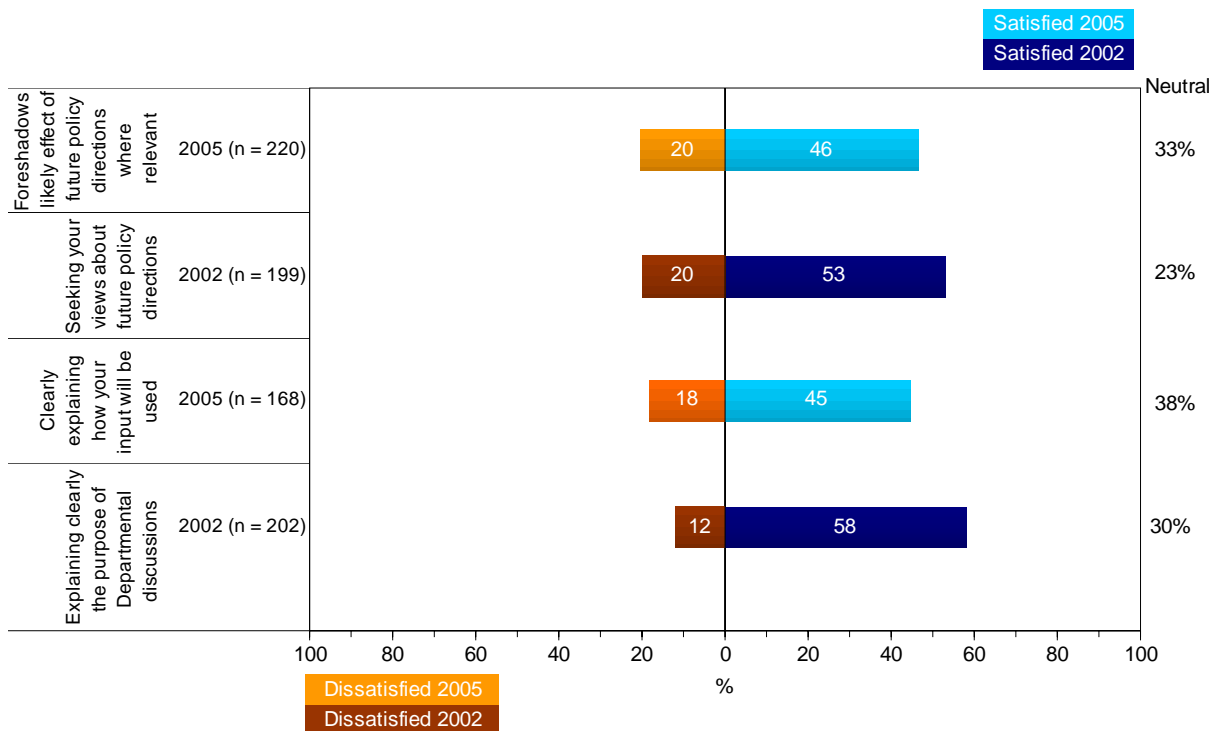
Qualitative findings suggest that, for those who are aware of the *Charter*, while some are of the opinion that it is of purely symbolic value, there is evidence that stakeholders have noticed improvements connected to DEST's *Open for Business* approach.

9

Importance and satisfaction

Having asked stakeholders to rate their satisfaction with DEST on a range of attributes covering the *Charter* commitments and other aspects of service, it is obviously a simple matter to determine how DEST is and is not satisfying its stakeholders. However, by examining the correlation between satisfaction on individual attributes and the measure of overall satisfaction, it is also possible to derive a measure of the importance of satisfying stakeholders on each of the attributes. By doing so, we have derived an objective measure of the priorities for action for DEST to improve further the satisfaction of its key stakeholders. It is also possible to identify a number of areas of importance to stakeholders in which DEST appears to be performing particularly well.

The matrix below is divided into four quadrants based on whether the attributes therein are of relatively higher or lower importance and relatively higher or lower satisfaction. Each of the quadrants are ranked from 1 to 4, and then the data from this matrix are discussed in that order.

Only attributes which score either relatively high or low on either satisfaction or importance are included in the discussion. This covers 17 of the 35 attributes measured. The remaining 18 fall close to the centre-point of the matrix.

9.1 First priority for action
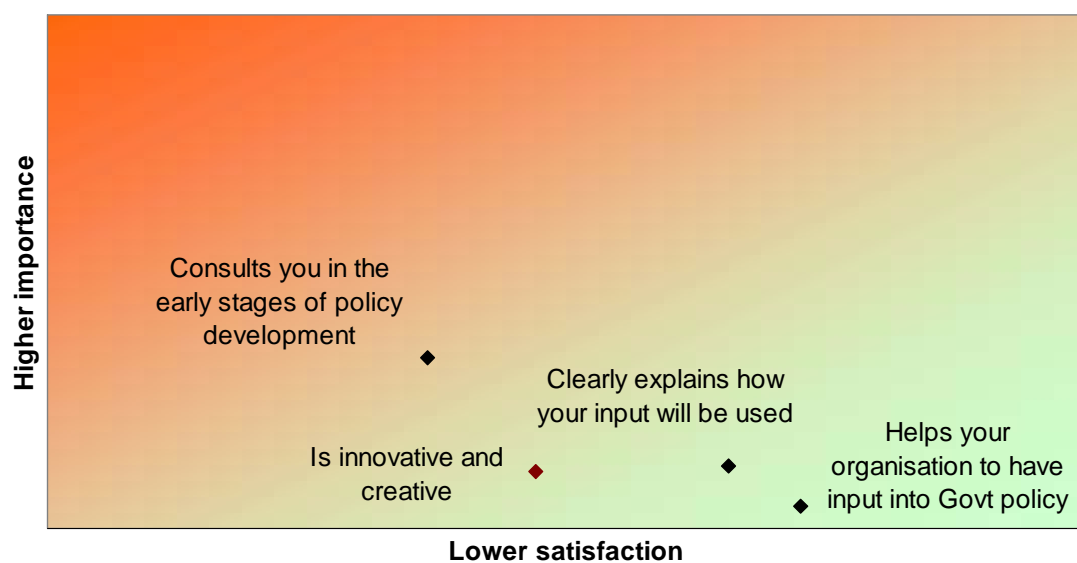
The highest priorities for action are those attributes on which stakeholders place relatively higher importance and report relatively lower satisfaction. Among the 35 attributes measured, there are four which fall into this category. Two are *Open for Business charter* commitments: 'clearly explaining how your input will be used' and 'helping stakeholder organisations to have input into Government policy'. DEST should investigate the means by which it could deliver greater satisfaction on these attributes. The remaining two are 'being innovative and creative' and 'consulting with stakeholders in the early stages of policy development'. Constant and considered attention needs to be given to ensure that everything possible is being done to encourage these tendencies more within the Department.

9.2 Second priority for action
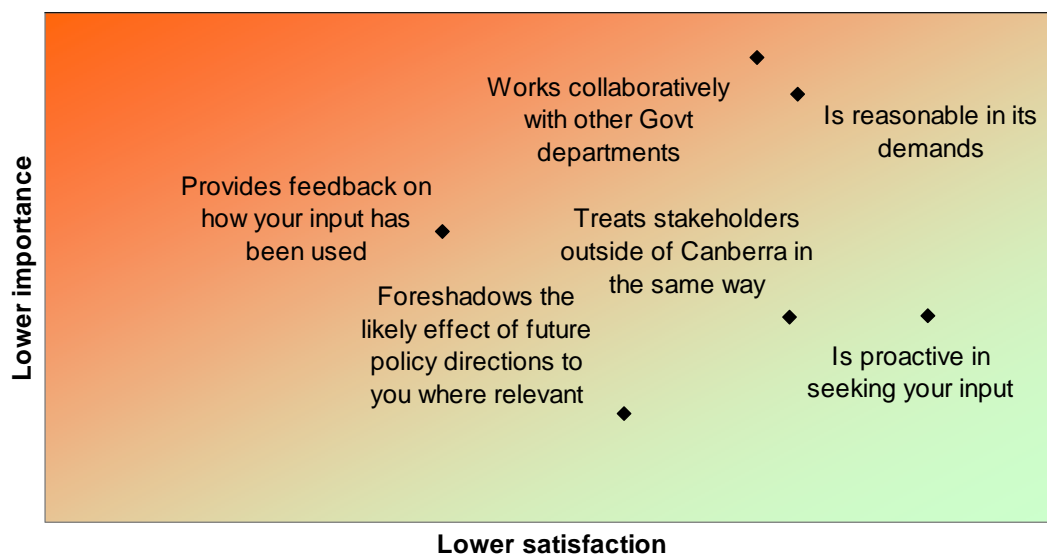
DEST aims to satisfy on all the attributes examined in this study. The second priorities for action are those attributes on which stakeholders report relatively lower satisfaction but also place relatively lower importance. There are six such attributes:

- provides feedback on how the input of stakeholders has been used;

- foreshadows the likely effect of future policy direction to stakeholders where relevant;

- works collaboratively with other Government departments;

- being reasonable in its demands;

- treats stakeholders outside of Canberra in the same way as those based in Canberra; and

- is proactive in seeking the input of stakeholders.

9.3 High-level maintenance
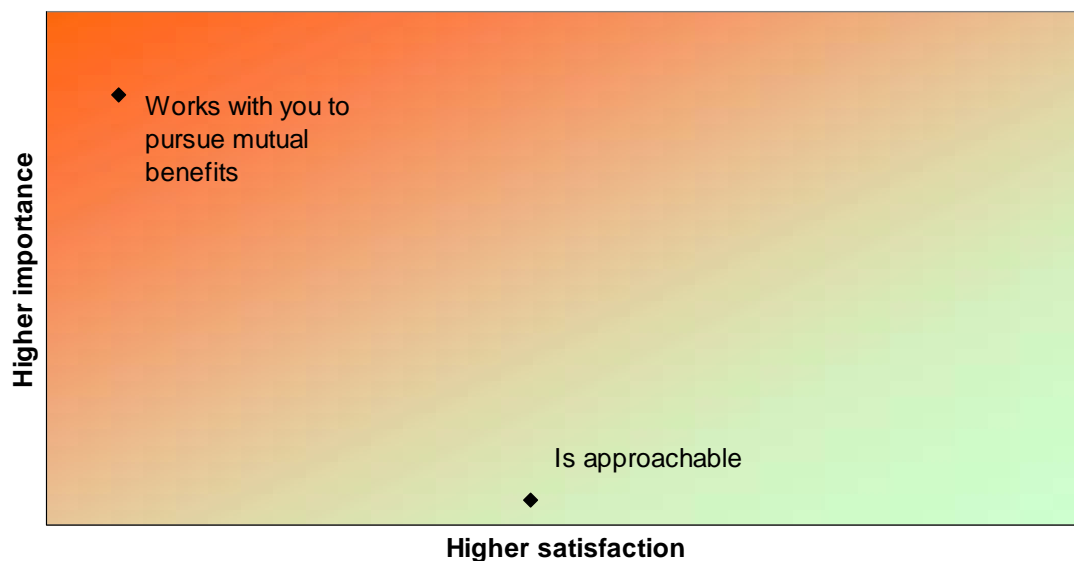
These are the attributes on which stakeholders place relatively higher importance and report relatively higher satisfaction. The performance on these attributes is a cause for celebration and DEST should strive to ensure that these levels of satisfaction are maintained. It may also wish to consider promoting these results among stakeholders. DEST's performance in 'being approachable' is particularly noteworthy. There is a strong case for promoting DEST's performance on the *Charter* commitment 'working with stakeholders to pursue mutual benefits' as the qualitative research indicated that this notion captures the imagination of stakeholders as a novel and positive way of thinking about their relationship with DEST, where both parties have something to gain or lose should the partnership succeed or fail.

9.4 Low-level maintenance
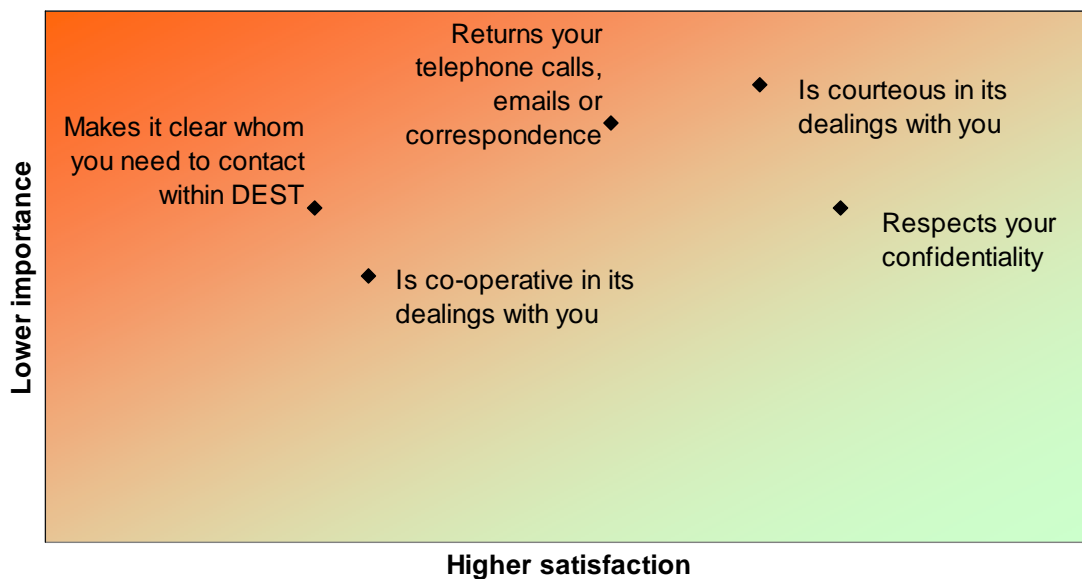
These are the attributes on which stakeholders report relatively higher satisfaction and place relatively lower importance. There are five such attributes:

- respects the confidentiality of stakeholders;

- is courteous in its dealing with stakeholders;

- returns the telephone calls and replies to the emails or correspondence of stakeholders;

- is co-operative in its dealing with stakeholders; and

- makes it clear whom you need to contact within DEST.

Relatively less attention needs to be taken to improve satisfaction on these attributes at this time, unless it is considered that stakeholders are under-valuing the importance of these attributes. This does not seem to be the case here as these are the kinds of attributes on which it is natural that stakeholders expect DEST to deliver. In this sense, these attributes can be considered the 'taken for granted' elements of the stakeholder relationship. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there is no evidence to suggest that attention should be diverted away from these service attributes.

9.5 The stakeholder database

The stakeholder database was developed in part to address areas of concern identified in the 2002 research and to continue to advance stakeholder relationships. Eureka is aware that DEST is currently considering a renovation of its corporate stakeholder database to maximise its value for the Department and its stakeholders alike. This research exercise provides further evidence that such action is warranted and will deliver deeper and more satisfying relationships. The following observations and suggestions, which arise from the experience of the Stakeholder Perceptions Survey 2005, may assist or complement this endeavour.

Ideally, the database should incorporate the following features:

- Clearly defined criteria for inclusion of stakeholders on the database. Upon what basis are stakeholders included? How comprehensive is the current database?

- More comprehensive information about stakeholder relationships. There does appear to be scope for better procedures to ensure that stakeholders' organisations are clearly understood, and that the history of their interaction with the Department is better recorded. This may help to address the perception that case histories are not sufficiently well documented, lessen the need for stakeholders to repeat themselves, and reassure them that, when rotation of DEST staff occurs, corporate knowledge of issues and concerns will not disappear.

- Clear procedures for updating the central database, with designated individuals responsible in each Group.

- Clear identification of stakeholders who appear on multiple lists. One clear finding of the survey was that it is not at all uncommon for stakeholders to interact regularly with more than one Group. Stakeholders' interactions with the Department could be improved by ensuring that Groups are aware of the extent to which they share responsibility for particular stakeholders, and that issues of concern to stakeholders are communicated across Groups where appropriate.

DEST may wish to further recognise the importance of its stakeholder relationships by implementing, in addition to an improved database tool, a more formalised relationship

program. To the extent that resources permit, key stakeholders could be assigned relationship managers to act as a conduit for communication, and to provide an unambiguous point of contact for consultation and discussion. At present, it appears that informal, personal relationships of a similar nature exist, and that they contribute in many cases significantly to the quality of relationships.

A

Appendix A: DEST stakeholder questionnaire

To be administered using computer-assisted telephone interviewing. Headings will not appear in field version.

RECORD GROUP, PRIORITY LEVEL, LOCATION & RESPONDENT ID.

Group	Priority 1	Priority 2
Higher Education		
Australian Education International (AEI)		
Indigenous Education		
Strategic Analysis and Evaluation		
Schools		
VET		
Science		

State	Metro	Non-metro
ACT		
New South Wales		
Queensland		
Victoria		
South Australia		
Western Australia		
Tasmania		
Northern Territory		
International		

Introduction

Hello, my name is [INTERVIEWER] and I'm calling from Eureka Strategic Research.

You recently received a letter inviting you to take part in a research project which we are conducting on behalf of the Department of Education, Science and Training. The project aims to determine ways in which the Department can strengthen its stakeholder

relationships by learning more about the experiences of stakeholders like you. It involves a voluntary, confidential survey, which takes around 15 minutes to complete.

.
If you choose to participate, the information and opinions you provide will be used for research purposes only. Do you have time to talk now?

YES	1 – THANK AND CONTINUE
NO, TIME INCONVENIENT	2 - ARRANGE CALL BACK
NO, NOT INTERESTED	3 - THANK AND SKIP TO SIGN-OFF

IF CLIENT QUERIED: This research is being conducted on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. We are contacting people nominated by the Department as key stakeholders.

IF QUERIED ABOUT BONA FIDES OF RESEARCH: I can provide the names of people who will verify the legitimate nature of this research project. The first is the Australian Market and Social Research Society enquiry line on 1300 36 4830. The second is the Project Manager at Eureka Strategic Research, John Sergeant, on (02) 9519 2021.

IF QUERIED ABOUT HOW NAME WAS SOURCED: You have been identified by senior executives in the [INSERT NAME OF GROUP FROM LIST] Group of the Department as a key stakeholder.

FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION GROUP ONLY: This group includes Australian Education International (AEI), the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR), Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS), and DEST International Services (DIS).

1   Nature of contact with DEST
The following questions ask you to reflect on **your personal experience** of the Department of Education, Science and Training. They focus on the nature of **your relationship with the Department itself**, rather than on issues surrounding current Government policy.

INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION: FOR THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS, IF THE RESPONDENT SAYS: 'DO YOU MEAN ME PERSONALLY OR THE GROUP/ORGANISATION I REPRESENT', TELL THE RESPONDENT TO ANSWER IN TERMS OF THEIR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH DEST.

1.1   I would like to begin by asking you several questions about your interaction with DEST. Which of the following groups do you deal with in your day-to-day interactions with DEST? [READ OUT – MULTIPLE RESPONSE]

Higher Education Group	1
International Education Group	2
Indigenous and Transitions Group	3
Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group	4
Schools Group	5
VET Group	6
Science Group	7
OTHER – DO NOT READ OUT [SPECIFY]	97
DON'T KNOW - DO NOT READ OUT	98
REFUSED – DO NOT READ OUT	99

1.2   [ASK IF MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE AT 1.1] Which one of these groups do you **most frequently** deal with in your day-to-day interactions? [READ OUT – SINGLE RESPONSE]

Higher Education Group	1
International Education Group	2
Indigenous and Transitions Group	3
Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group	4
Schools Group	5
VET Group	6
Science Group	7
OTHER – DO NOT READ OUT [SPECIFY]	97
DON'T KNOW - DO NOT READ OUT	98
REFUSED – DO NOT READ OUT	99

[INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF RESPONDENT IS RELUCTANT TO GIVE A GENERAL VIEW OF DEST AT ANY STAGE, THEY MAY ANSWER IN RESPECT OF THE SECTION WITH WHICH THEY DEAL MOST FREQUENTLY.]

1.3   In a typical month, how often do you personally have contact with someone from DEST, in any way? Would you say you have contact…[READ OUT – SINGLE RESPONSE]

Less than once a month	1
Once every few weeks	2
Weekly	3
Several times weekly	4
Daily	5
REFUSED [DO NOT READ OUT]	99

1.4   And in which of the following ways do you typically have contact with DEST?
[READ OUT – MULTIPLE RESPONSE]

By email	1
By written correspondence	2
By telephone	3
In person at meetings	4
At seminars or conferences	5
Through the DEST website or on-line systems	6
Other [RECORD VERBATIM]	97
REFUSED – DO NOT READ OUT	99

1.5   What are the main reasons for your contact with DEST? Is your contact related
to…[READ OUT]

	Yes	No	Don't know
Seeking information about policy, regulations or programs	1	2	9
Providing input into policy decision-making	1	2	9
Applying for new funding	1	2	9
Meeting compliance requirements for ongoing funding	1	2	9
Administering projects funded by DEST	1	2	9
Developing or managing joint initiatives in partnership with DEST?	1	2	9
Seeking support for industry activities?	1	2	9
Networking or general discussion with DEST	1	2	9
Supplying goods or services to DEST [IF YES, SKIP STATEMENTS MARKED WITH * AT 3.1 AND 3.2]	1	2	9
Other reason/s [SPECIFY]	1	2	9

1.6   With which of the following DEST Offices do you have contact in your day-to-day
interactions …[READ OUT – MULTIPLE RESPONSE]

The National Office in Canberra	1
Your State Office	2
Your District Office	3
OTHER – DO NOT READ OUT [SPECIFY]	97
DON'T KNOW - DO NOT READ OUT	98
REFUSED – DO NOT READ OUT	99

1.7   [ASK IF MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE AT 1.6] With which of these Offices do you **most frequently** deal in your day-to-day interactions?

The National Office in Canberra	1
Your State Office	2
Your District Office	3
OTHER – DO NOT READ OUT [SPECIFY]	97
DON'T KNOW - DO NOT READ OUT	98
REFUSED – DO NOT READ OUT	99

1.8   [ASK IF CODE 3 AT 1.6] And with which DEST **District Office** do you most frequently deal? [DO NOT READ OUT, SINGLE RESPONSE]

Albany	1
Albury	2
Alice Springs	3
Armidale	4
Batemans Bay	5
Bendigo	6
Brisbane ATSIEU	7
Broken Hill	8
Broome	9
Bunbury	10
Cairns	11
Canberra	12
Dubbo	13
Katherine	14
Geraldton	15
Griffith	16
Gympie	17
Kalgoorlie	18
Kempsey	19
Kununurra	20
Lismore	21
Mackay	22
Mildura	23
Moree	24
Morwell	25
Mount Isa	26
Port Augusta	27
Port Hedland	28
Newcastle	29
Nhulunbuy	30
Nowra	31
Orange	32
Rockhampton	33
Taree	34

Tennant Creek	35
Toowoomba	36
Torres Strait	37
Townsville	38
Wagga Wagga	39
Walgett	40
Wollongong	41
Wyong	42
DON'T KNOW	98
REFUSED	99

1.9   And do your day-to-day interactions with DEST involve contact with… [READ OUT – MULTI RESPONSE]

The **leadership** (Secretary and the Deputy Secretaries)	1
The **senior executives**, including Group Managers and Branch Heads	2
State and Territory managers, or	3
Staff at the **non senior executive** level	4
DON'T KNOW - DO NOT READ OUT	98
REFUSED – DO NOT READ OUT	99

1.10   Which **two other Government departments** do you most frequently deal with (at either Federal or State/Territory levels)? [RECORD RESPONSES]

[IF 6 AT 1.4] You mentioned earlier that you have accessed DEST's website or on-line systems. Which of the following on-line services have you used?

	Yes	No	Don't know
On-line publications	1	2	9
Ministers' websites	1	2	9
Other DEST websites or portals	1	2	9
Subscriber services	1	2	9
DEST's e-business systems	1	2	9

1.11 [ASK FOR EACH SERVICE USED AT 1.11] Overall, on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'extremely dissatisfied' and 10 means 'extremely satisfied' how satisfied are you with …? [RECORD RATING]

	Rating
On-line publications	
Ministers' websites	
Other DEST websites or portals	
Subscriber services	
DEST's e-business systems	

2   Relationship with DEST

2.1   I would now like to ask you some questions about how you feel about your relationship with DEST. **Overall**, on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'extremely bad' and 10 means 'extremely good', how would you describe your relationship with DEST **at this time**? [RECORD RATING. DON'T KNOW=98. N/A=99]

2.2   [IF 1 AT 1.9] **Overall**, on the same scale from zero to ten, how would you describe your relationship with DEST's **leadership at this time**? By 'leadership', we mean the Secretary and the Deputy Secretaries. [RECORD RATING. DON'T KNOW=98. N/A=99]

2.3   [IF 2 AT 1. 9] **Overall**, on the same scale from zero to ten, how would you describe your relationship with DEST's **senior executives at this time**? Senior executives include Group Managers and Branch Managers. [RECORD RATING. DON'T KNOW=98. N/A=99]

2.4   [IF 3 AT 1.9] **Overall**, on the same scale from zero to ten, how would you describe your relationship with DEST's **State and Territory managers at this time**? RECORD RATING. DON'T KNOW=98. N/A=99]

2.5   [IF 4 AT 1.9] **Overall**, on the same scale from zero to ten, how would you describe your relationship with DEST's **non executive staff at this time**? [RECORD RATING. DON'T KNOW=98. N/A=99]

2.6   Thinking about the last twelve months, would you say that the relationship you now have with DEST is better than, worse than, or the same as it was twelve months ago? [SINGLE RESPONSE]

BETTER	1
WORSE	2
THE SAME	3
DON'T KNOW – DO NOT READ OUT	98
REFUSED – DO NOT READ OUT	99

3   Attitudinal statements

3.1   There are a number of different ways in which stakeholders interact with DEST. For each of the following, please tell me how satisfied you are with the Department's performance. Again, please use a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'extremely dissatisfied' and 10 means 'extremely satisfied'. How satisfied are you with the Department's performance in… [READ OUT AND ROTATE. RECORD RATING. DON'T KNOW=98. N/A=99.]

	Rating
Helping you understand Australian Government policies and programs	
Understanding your views about existing policies	
Helping your organisation to have input into Government policy decision making	
*Clearly explaining how your input will be used	
Seeking a variety of views and opinions	
Building a relationship of trust with you	
Working with you to pursue mutual benefits	

3.2   And, again, on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'extremely dissatisfied' and 10 means 'extremely satisfied', how satisfied are you that DEST… [READ OUT AND ROTATE. RECORD RATING. DON'T KNOW=98. N/A=99.]

	Rating
*Consults with you on an ongoing basis	
*Consults you in the early stages of policy development	
Foreshadows the likely effect of future policy directions to you where relevant	
Maintains an open and unambiguous relationship with you	
Maintains an open and unambiguous relationship with other advocacy bodies, professional associations and community groups	
Is reasonable in its demands	
Is courteous in its dealings with you	
Makes it clear whom you need to contact within DEST	
*Is proactive in seeking your input	
Shares information and knowledge willingly	
Respects your confidentiality	
Is co-operative in its dealings with you	
Is responsive to your organisation's needs	
Demonstrates understanding of your organisation	
Provides well-informed and capable staff	
Works collaboratively with individuals	
Provides information to you in a useful format	
Willingly offers advice	
Is innovative and creative	
*Is even-handed in its involvement of stakeholders	
*Provides feedback on how your input has been used	
Works collaboratively with other Government departments	
*Treats stakeholders outside of Canberra in the same way as those based in Canberra	

Values your expertise	
Is approachable	
Is enthusiastic	
Is openly accountable for its actions	
Returns your telephone calls, emails or correspondence	

* Statements so marked were not asked of those stakeholders who report supplying goods or services to DEST.

3.3   Are you aware of the Department's *Open for Business charter*?

YES	1
NO	0
UNSURE	9

3.4   Apart from what we've already discussed, are there any additional comments you would like to make about your relationship with DEST or suggestions for strengthening that relationship? [RECORD VERBATIM RESPONSE]

4   Sign-off

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey. Your feedback is greatly appreciated

[ONLY IF REQUESTED] If you would like to speak to someone in the Department about this survey, please contact Max Schneider, Parliamentary and Communications Branch, (02) 6240 5407.

I am required to advise you that this survey has been approved by the Australian Government Statistical Clearing House. The approval number is 01607-01. You may phone the Statistical Clearing House on (02) 6252 5285 to verify the approval number if you wish.

B

Appendix B: Approach letter

SECRETARY

Australian Government

Department of Education, Science and Training

Dear xx

I am writing to let you know about research the Department is about to conduct to help us enhance the quality of our relationship with stakeholders, like you, who have an interest in education, science and/or training issues.

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), cares about being "Open For Business". This research will look at how well we work with you, and help us address areas that might need improving. Some of the issues the research will explore include: how easily you feel you can interact with the Department; how open we are; and how responsive we are.

We have engaged an independent research group to conduct this research. You may soon be contacted by a representative from Eureka Strategic Research and asked if you wish to participate in a short, voluntary telephone survey. The survey will take no longer than 15 minutes to complete and the interview can be arranged at a time convenient to you.

Eureka is bound by a strict code of ethics that enforces confidentiality and anonymity. Your comments will be considered together with those of other participants, and neither I nor anyone else in the Department will know how any individual stakeholder has responded.

Should you have any questions about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact the Project Manager at Eureka, John Sergeant, on (02) 9519 2021 or the Departmental contact officer for this project, Max Schneider, on (02) 6240 5407.

I thank you in anticipation of your support. Your involvement in the survey will ensure that DEST remains attentive to your needs and views.

Yours sincerely

Lisa Paul

C

Appendix C: DEST stakeholder interview guide

Introduction
- Thank for participating.

- Purpose: To discuss your relationship with the Department of Education, Science and Training and to explore any ways in which you, as a key stakeholder, think this relationship could be enhanced.

- No right or wrong answers, your opinion that counts.

- Audio taping: Request permission, assure confidentiality, anonymity.

- Interview will take between half an hour and 45 minutes.

Current situation
- What is your role in your organisation? How long have you occupied this role?

- How often do you personally have contact with a representative of DEST?

    o With whom do you have contact?

    o Is this contact initiated mostly by you or by the Department?

    o When do you contact DEST? For what purpose?

    o When are you contacted by DEST? For what purpose?

    o Via what channels does contact usually occur?

Nature of the relationship
- How would you describe the overall nature of your relationship with DEST?

    o What does the relationship aim to achieve? From the point of view of your organisation? From the point of view of the Department?

- Can you think of an area in which your relationship with DEST has met or exceeded your expectations?

  o [*Probe*] What were the circumstances? In what ways was the outcome positive? In what ways, if at all, did DEST's performance lead to your being satisfied on that occasion?

- Can you think of an occasion on which you were less than satisfied with your relationship with DEST?

- [*Probe*] If so, what were the circumstances? What do you think caused your dissatisfaction on that occasion?

If you have interactions with a variety of areas in DEST, have you noticed contrasting levels of support from different areas? In what ways?

DEST as a source of information and advice

- In what format/s do you access or receive information from DEST? Does this satisfy your needs? Why/Why not?

  o Have you ever used DEST's on-line services? Which services? How useful have you found them? In what ways, if any, might DEST improve its on-line presence to meet your needs more thoroughly?

- How responsive have you found DEST to be to requests for information and/or advice?

  o Is it clear whom you should contact within the Department when you have questions or concerns? Are you usually able to contact the most appropriate person to field your enquiry?

- How well has DEST anticipated the kind of information you need? i.e. do you find DEST to be more 'proactive' or 'reactive' in providing information? Examples?

  o Have you ever encountered a reluctance to share information? If so, can you describe the circumstances? Why do you think this was the case?

  o How well does information from DEST meet your business needs? Is there any area in which you would like more information? What could the Department do, if anything, to keep you better informed?

- Overall, how accurate have you found the Department's information? How useful? In what ways?

DEST's attitude and conduct

- What words would you use to describe the DEST staff with whom you have dealt?

- How important is it to you that the Department should demonstrate an adequate understanding of your organisation and the way it works? Its needs and constraints? To what extent do you feel that it does this?

- Do you feel that DEST values your expertise? The expertise of your colleagues?

Collaboration

- To what extent do you think your organisation's relationship with DEST is collaborative? Why/ why not?

- How accurate would it be to say that the Department maintains an *open* relationship with your organisation?

- Do you feel that your organisation is given sufficient opportunity to inform policy decisions?

    o When, ideally, should your organisation be consulted? Is this the case at present?

    o Would you say that DEST listens to your opinions and concerns? Why do you think this is the case?

    o How much feedback do you receive about the consequences of your input?

    o In what ways, if at all, does DEST foreshadow future policy directions that will affect your organisation?

- Do you feel that DEST liaises effectively with other Government departments? What gives you that impression?

    o Are there instances in which you deal with more than one department in relation to a single issue? To what extent is the response provided by those departments consistent? To what extent would you say they operate in an integrated, co-operative manner? Example?

Confidence in DEST

- Do you feel that DEST delivers Government services fairly and impartially? In what ways does it engender trust?

- Do you feel that DEST respects confidentiality? Why do you say that?

- Do you feel that DEST is even-handed in its dealings with stakeholders? In what way?

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- How accountable is the Department for its decisions and actions? How transparent?

Awareness of Open for Business charter

- Are you aware of the Department's *Open for Business charter*?

  o If yes, what is your opinion of it? In what ways, if any, could it be improved?

  o How satisfied are you that the Department's performance meets the standards of the *Charter*?

General satisfaction

- In overall terms, how satisfied are you with your relationship with DEST?

  o What things do you think the Department does well?

  o In what areas could it improve?

- Would you prefer to have contact more or less often? Why?

- Do you have any other suggestions for improving communication?

- In what ways has your relationship **with** DEST changed over the past 12-18 months? Do you think these changes have been for the better? Why/why not?

- Are you aware of any trends or developments which you feel may affect the nature of your relationship with the Department in the future? What are they? How, in your opinion, can the Department best respond to them?

Any other issues?

- Is there anything else you would like to comment on, or any suggestions you would like to make, in relation to the way DEST communicates and manages its relationships with stakeholders?

Thank and sign-off

- Thank you on behalf of the Department of Education, Science and Training. Your comments and suggestions, together with those of other participants, will be used to help the Department identify ways in which it can continue to enhance its relationship with stakeholders.

Reassure confidentiality, anonymity.

D

Appendix D: Group differences in satisfaction

The primary focus of the survey was to investigate satisfaction with DEST as a whole. One of the secondary objectives of the research was to investigate any differences in satisfaction between the stakeholders of various Groups within the Department.

As mentioned in Section 3.4, it was common for stakeholders to report having had contact with a number of Groups. In the tables below, we make comment on any statistically significant differences in satisfaction ratings according to the Group nominated by each stakeholder in the survey as the Group with which they have most frequent contact. We note significant differences in the percentage satisfied or the percentage dissatisfied where the number answering that question is greater than 10.[1]

In each cell, we give the percentage falling in that category within the Group, followed in brackets by the percentage falling in that category within the total sample. Results that are significantly higher or lower than average are marked with an asterisk. Before presenting the table, however, it is worth making some comments on how these figures are to be interpreted.

First, it is important to note what is not included in the following tables. There are **no differences between Groups in satisfaction with their relationship with DEST**. All differences in the tables below are on particular aspects of the service they receive (the 35 service attributes examined in the survey).

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[1] We make no mention of significant differences in the percentage giving a neutral rating, given such results have few strategic implications.

Second, those differences that are observed can be the result of one or more of the following:

- differences in the service performance of the particular Group;

- differences in the degree of difficulty that Groups face in managing the programs and policy issues within their remit; and

- differences in the expectations of the different stakeholders of particular Groups.

Nevertheless, differences are worthy of note whatever their cause.

Third, it is worth noting that, for each question, the respondent was asked whether they are satisfied with the **Department's performance** (the primary research question), not with the performance of the Group. While that perception will reflect their interactions with the Group with which they have most frequent contact, it will be influenced by their interactions with people from other Groups and DEST personnel who cannot be assigned to any one Group (such as the national leadership as well as the State and Territory Managers).

Fourth, the ability to pick up statistical differences depends in part on the size of the Group sample. Consequently, the differences below are considered in order of Group sample size, from the largest to the smallest. This means that there are no differences reported for the Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group.

Schools

Statement	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Neutral
Clearly explaining how your input will be used	13 (18)	59 (45)*	28 (38)
Provides well-informed and capable staff	7 (10)	88 (72)*	5 (19)
Works collaboratively with other Government departments	8 (18)	69 (52)*	23 (31)
Returns your telephone calls, emails or correspondence	2 (6)	95 (84)*	3 (10)

Higher Education

Statement	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Neutral
Helping your organisation to have input into Government policy decision making	22 (17)	35 (50)*	43 (33)
Clearly explaining how your input will be used	26 (18)	30 (45)*	44 (38)
Consults with you on an ongoing basis	23 (15)	40 (57)*	37 (28)
Foreshadows the likely effect of future policy directions to you where relevant	33 (21)*	33 (46)*	35 (33)
Is reasonable in its demands	36 (18)*	36 (55)*	28 (27)
Works collaboratively with individuals	22 (11)*	47 (65)*	31 (24)
Is innovative and creative	30 (19)*	33 (43)	37 (39)
Provides feedback on how your input has been used	49 (29)*	16 (35)*	35 (37)
Works collaboratively with other Government departments	35 (18)	35 (52)*	29 (31)
Values your expertise	19 (10)*	49 (66)*	32 (24)
Is enthusiastic	11 (8)	54 (67)*	35 (25)
Is openly accountable for its actions	26 (15)*	38 (56)*	36 (29)

Vocational Education and Training

Statement	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Neutral
Is innovative and creative	3 (19)*	52 (43)	45 (39)
Is openly accountable for its actions	8 (15)	77 (56)*	15 (29)
Returns your telephone calls, emails or correspondence	14 (6)*	83 (84)	3 (10)

Indigenous and transitions

Statement	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Neutral
Is reasonable in its demands	14 (18)	75 (55)*	11 (27)

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Australian Education International

Statement	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Neutral
Helping you understand Australian Government policies and programs	15 (7)	45 (74)*	40 (19)
Working with you to pursue mutual benefits	10 (9)	48 (69)*	43 (22)
Maintains an open and unambiguous relationship with you	14 (9)	43 (64)*	43 (27)
Is courteous in its dealings with you	10 (1)*	76 (92)*	14 (7)
Shares information and knowledge willingly	29 (14)*	67 (65)	5 (21)
Is co-operative in its dealings with you	14 (5)*	62 (76)	24 (18)
Is responsive to your organisation's needs	19 (14)	29 (58)*	52 (28)
Provides well-informed and capable staff	14 (10)	48 (72)*	38 (19)
Willingly offers advice	10 (7)	52 (72)*	38 (21)
Returns your telephone calls, emails or correspondence	10 (6)	67 (84)*	24 (10)

Science

Statement	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Neutral
Helping your organisation to have input into Government policy decision making	5 (17)	74 (50)*	21 (33)
Foreshadows the likely effect of future policy directions to you where relevant	0 (21)*	40 (46)	60 (33)

Appendix E: Further methodological details

This section outlines the rationale behind the methodology adopted, and provides further technical details related to the conduct of the research.

E.1 Quantitative survey

An initial quantitative research component was designed to measure stakeholders' current understanding of, and attitudes to, their relationships with DEST and the *Open for Business charter*. This phase provided a basis for the objective comparison of findings with previous (and future) waves of quantitative research.

Survey methodology
The survey was administered via Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). This method was selected because telephone provides the most cost-effective means of contacting a large number of people quickly, while at the same time ensuring appropriate geographic coverage. Further, the telephone offers a level of anonymity that maximises honesty and openness in survey responses.

Questionnaire design
Key sections of the questionnaire used in the 2002 benchmark were incorporated into the research. In order to enable comparison of key measures with previous findings, changes to the format of existing questions were limited to those that were deemed likely to significantly improve the quality of information obtained, to reflect structural changes in DEST that have occurred since 2002, and to provide a more rigorous basis for comparison in future waves. The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the Departmental managers of the research and the DEST Corporate Leadership Group, and was also submitted to, and approved by, the Australian Government Statistical Clearing House before entering field (approval number 01607-01). The final questionnaire is attached as Appendix A.

Fieldwork
The fieldwork for the quantitative phase of this project was conducted by AMRInteractive. AMRInteractive is a member of the Australian Society

of Market and Social Research (AMSRS) and, as such, abides by the Market and Social Research Privacy Principles. It is professionally and operationally accredited to ICC/Esomar (International Chamber of Commerce and the European Society for Opinion and Market Research) standards through the AMSRS's Quality Assurance Programme (MRQA). This is an accreditation system that sets standards for data collection and interviewer training. Accredited market research companies are annually audited to ensure these standards are maintained.

The questionnaire took, on average, 15 minutes. This duration was optimal in that it was not too long and burdensome for respondents, yet it was comprehensive.

Sampling   A random sample of **225** of DEST's key stakeholders participated in this phase of the research. The sample was recruited from the Department's corporate database of key stakeholders.

While the body of DEST's stakeholders is admittedly much broader, this research focused on **key stakeholders** who influence, seek to influence, or actively participate in DEST policy development and/or program delivery. This includes contacts in:

- universities;

- the training and school sectors;

- state and territory agencies;

- employers and employer bodies;

- Indigenous organisations;

- relevant union bodies;

- professional and industry associations; and

- peak organisations covering each of the Department's business areas (e.g., Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee, the Academy of Science, the Association of Independent Schools).

In line with the categorisation used in the 2002 survey, individual contacts from stakeholder organisations were also classified into 'priority' levels to ensure an adequate depth in the sample: in other words, staff from a range of senior organisational levels were included in the research. Priority one contacts, for example, included CEOs, heads of departments and university vice-chancellors, and priority two contacts included staff at slightly lower organisational levels. Both types of contact were included at each stage of the research.

Conduct   In order to maximise participation rates, a letter of introduction signed by the Departmental Secretary was sent to all identified potential participants before the commencement of fieldwork. This letter informed stakeholders of the upcoming research and its aims, the possibility of their being contacted, and the importance of their involvement. A copy of the letter is attached to this report as Appendix B.

E.2 Qualitative in-depth interviews

While the quantitative phase of research allowed the researchers to identify areas in which disparities exist between stakeholders' needs and expectations and their perceptions of the Department's performance, a qualitative phase enabled a deeper exploration of the scope of individual stakeholder experiences.

Methodology   A series of **16 in-depth telephone interviews** were conducted personally by members of the project team. The reasons why depth interviews were preferable in this context include:

- **Convenience**: Depth interviews were more convenient for our participants in that they could be conducted at the participants' chosen time and place. In-depth interviews also allowed for flexibility in the event of last minute changes to the participants' schedule.

- **Depth of feedback**: In-depth interviews enabled interviewers to explore the detailed and specific nature of individual participants' experiences, perceptions, needs and expectations relating to their relationships with DEST. They also allowed a more comprehensive examination of disparities between each stakeholder's expectations and perceptions of the Department's performance than would be possible using other qualitative methodologies.

- ■ **Confidentiality**: Although the topic of the interviews was not overly controversial, the use of a qualitative technique in which participants have complete anonymity and confidentiality (with regard to other research participants) allowed participants to feel comfortable in providing in-depth feedback. Conducting these depth interviews over the telephone added to participants' perceptions of anonymity and subsequent candour.

Sampling   Care was taken to ensure that the diversity of DEST's stakeholders was represented in the depth interviews. The sample was structured to include eight different types of stakeholder organisation.

Conduct   A comprehensive interview guide for the in-depth interviews with stakeholders was developed in conjunction with DEST. The guide covered the same variety of topics as the survey questionnaire, and provided the opportunity for participants to introduce and elaborate on issues of importance to them. A copy of the interview guide is attached at Appendix C.

All interviews were approximately half to three-quarters of an hour in duration. This length of time appropriately balanced the need to collect in-depth information, whilst not imposing any undue burden on the stakeholders.

Where stakeholders agreed, depth interviews were audio-taped for subsequent analysis by Eureka consultants. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants was ensured at all times.