

CHAPTER 1

The Secretary's Overview



Dr Jeff Harmer, Secretary of the Department of Education, Science and Training.

Education, science and training are critical to the future success of Australia. The department has a vision of 'a better future for all Australians through learning, science and innovation' supported by an 'Open for Business' philosophy. We are committed to implementing successfully the Australian Government's objectives through professionally and courteously serving our Ministers.

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) is responsible for two of the Australian Government's strategic priorities outlined by the Prime Minister in November 2002: education, and science and innovation. Education and training are key drivers of economic, cultural and

social development, while science and innovation are fundamental in making us internationally competitive.

DEST has an excellent track record in developing and implementing policies and programmes on behalf of the Australian Government, following broad engagement with stakeholders. Excellence in policy advice is based on skilled analysis, quality data and a thorough understanding of stakeholders' priorities and concerns, and requires trained and resourceful minds applying judgment to the issues. DEST constantly strives for policy based on evidence, and good analysis to support our policy positions. DEST has a strong research and analysis capacity harnessed through the Research, Analysis

and Evaluation Group, which provides support across the department, as well as policy coordination with a particular focus on cross-sectoral and whole of government issues.

New policy development has been a key feature of 2002–03 with continued intense activity, as this year's *Annual Report* demonstrates.



Working to achieve a better future

A major review of the higher education sector started in April 2002 with the release of an overview paper, *Higher Education at the Crossroads*. Six issues papers were produced, and after extensive stakeholder consultation, the department developed a new policy framework for ministerial consideration. *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future* was released in May 2003. The reforms will establish a partially deregulated system of higher education, with new arrangements for student financing to encourage lifelong learning. The new policy recognises that higher education will be the foundation upon which the 21st century will be built for Australia, with the funding shared by stakeholders.

There were significant developments in the Australian Government's science and innovation agenda in 2002–03. The department oversaw a programme of work and consultation that led to the Prime Minister's announcement of Australia's four national research priorities in December 2002, setting a clear direction for Australian research. The department also commenced a major project to map Australia's science and innovation capacity as a first step in progressing a policy framework to follow on from the Australian Government's 2001 *Backing Australia's Ability* innovation plan.

Last year DEST continued to develop strong working relationships with other Australian Government departments as well as state and territory governments. One of the major outcomes was a national review of nursing education which was coordinated and managed by DEST. The final report, *Our Duty of Care*, was jointly released by the Minister for Education, Science and Training and the Minister for Health and Ageing in September 2002. Nursing education was also an issue addressed in the higher education review.

Vocational education and training continues to be a key component of the Australian Government's education agenda. DEST was proactive in supporting the vocational education and training sector by reviewing market needs. The New Apprenticeships Incentives Programme was reviewed, and the outcomes announced in September 2002. New incentives for employers of New Apprentices were introduced from 1 January 2003. Other changes, which came into effect on 1 July 2003, focus on ensuring New Apprentices complete their training and face simplified administrative processes. The department also undertook a significant exercise, culminating in the announcement of new contracts offered to 37 organisations, known as New Apprenticeships Centres, to deliver New Apprenticeships Support Services from 1 July 2003. These New Apprenticeships Centres will assist employers to sign up an estimated 770 000 New Apprentices over the next three years.

The need to maintain and ensure quality in education remained a key focus for the department during the year. A review of teaching and teacher education is nearing completion, that will identify ways to energise science, technology and mathematics and sustain a culture of innovation in Australia's schools. Australia needs to be an innovative country, and to

take advantage of new technologies, if we are to be competitive internationally. We must ensure that Australia continues to attract and retain world-class teachers of science, technology and mathematics in the future. Developing greater scientific awareness in the general population, inspiring more young people to take up careers that depend on excellence in science, technology and mathematics, and building a culture of innovation in Australia's schools, are of the utmost importance if Australia and its people are to continue to lead and thrive.

In spite of the many dramatic world events in 2002–03, we have seen continuing growth in international demand for Australian education. That is partly a reflection of the sheer scale of the underlying global demand, and partly a reflection of the competitive advantage of perceptions about Australia. The scale of demand for education is simply beyond the capacity of the developing countries to deal with, and developed countries have a duty of care to help service this demand and assist in capacity building. Such contributions will in part take the form of targeted aid, but the bulk of the service provision will be through trade. Australia's active engagement in this provision is crucial to its future role in the world. International education and research linkages are about forming personal and institutional ties. They underpin our foreign diplomacy and business trading. The stronger the links, the better the quality of the ties with key decision makers, the more likely we are to be influential and have our interests understood. Moreover, since our aims for internationalisation of education also relate to the personal transformation of individuals, there is sense in our seeking top quality students from a diversity of source countries. The department, through AEI – The Australian Government International Education Network, has provided infrastructure, expertise and a brand to


build Australia's credentials in this regard, by ensuring that our provision of international education and training is backed up with strong regulatory frameworks, assurance of quality, recognition of qualifications and reputation in service delivery.

During 2002–03 there was, therefore, a major review of international education activities culminating in the Budget announcements on 13 May 2003. The new framework has an expanded focus on the future, the sustainability of the industry, on partnerships and better integration of services. As Australia's third largest services export, the education and training of overseas students result in great benefits to the nation. The new measures reflect a whole of government approach to support this key industry.

Whatever we achieve in education and training, we cannot be judged to have succeeded while outcomes for Indigenous Australians lag far behind the experience of other Australians. The department takes very seriously its commitment to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) trial to ensure that the best possible use is made of the resources going into Indigenous programmes. Our task is to develop new ways of providing assistance that are more flexible, more attuned to the needs of the community and based on plans developed by the community. As lead agency, DEST is working with Murdi Paaki, an ATSIC region in the north-west of NSW, to improve outcomes for Indigenous people.

Working better – Awards

While looking back at what we have achieved as a department, I believe it is important to recognise those in the department who were publicly recognised for their immense contribution to others.



In the Australia Day Honours Lists announced in January, Robyn Dass, Manager of DEST's Cairns District Office, was awarded a Public Service Medal in recognition of her outstanding service and excellent contribution to the department and the Australian community. For more than 15 years Robyn has demonstrated leadership to improve education, training and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians and shown an outstanding ability to engage key institutional stakeholders and the broader community in promoting the Commonwealth's objectives and programmes.

In the Queen's Birthday Honours List 2003, Dr Joanne Daly received the Public Service Medal for outstanding public service in the development of Australia's national research priorities, and to science and its application. Dr Daly is now with the CSIRO as Chief of the Entomology Division but remains deeply committed to the national research priorities. Dr Judy West, who is on secondment from CSIRO and heads up our Science and Innovation Mapping Taskforce, was also made an Officer of the Order of Australia. This was for her service to the advancement of botanical science and research, particularly in the field of plant systematics, to science administration and policy development, and to the establishment of Australia's Virtual Herbarium.

DEST, along with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, was recognised in the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Sector Management, announced in December 2002. The special commendation was for the use of new technologies in the *Electronic Confirmation of Enrolment (eCoE)* Project. The joint project enables both departments to manage more effectively information about the movement of international students and to protect the

integrity of the student visa programme. We continue to strive for excellence in the delivery of services online.

It is also timely to acknowledge the contribution of the department's social club, ClubDEST, which has raised funds for various charities. Notably, ClubDEST has given a three year commitment of \$3 000 annually, to support three 'Learning for Life' scholarships with the Smith Family. The scholarships help a primary, secondary and tertiary student, one of whom must be an Indigenous person. As education can help prevent a life of hardship, the Smith Family scholarships give those who are disadvantaged a chance to reach their full potential, and the department, through ClubDEST, is keen to offer its support.

Working with people outside the department – 'Open for Business'

The department has a charter for our relationships with stakeholders called 'Open for Business', arising from our belief that if we are not consultative and not seen to be open we cannot do our business effectively.

Stakeholder input is crucial to our ability to provide good policy advice. We are strongly committed to improving our relationships with stakeholders by balancing accountability with accessibility, confidentiality with inclusiveness, and responsiveness with the national interest.

The Stakeholder Charter requires DEST to seek ongoing feedback from stakeholders about the quality of their relationships with the department. A survey was conducted in August 2002, and the results were impressive. It was pleasing to find that the vast majority of DEST's stakeholders are satisfied with

their relationship with DEST overall, with its leadership, senior executives and operational staff; and that the relationship between DEST and its stakeholders has improved over the last 12 months. The survey has also helped us identify areas for improvement, such as regular and systematic consultation with stakeholders. We are committed to surveying regularly and to responding to concerns.

The ability to ‘think outside the square’ and the culture of openness in the organisation were actively demonstrated through the development of the higher education reform package. In discussing the implementation of the package, vice-chancellors and others, both inside and outside the bureaucracy, commented on how we were prepared to listen, engage, raise options, make papers available, have discussions, and so on — we were ‘open’.

DEST people – Stay Here and Grow

External stakeholders are important, but so too are our DEST people. People are the department’s most important asset. The dedication, professionalism and commitment demonstrated by staff are very impressive.

A key achievement last year was the development of the new certified agreement, which embodies values and behaviours in the performance management framework.


In December 2002, the *Stay Here and Grow-DEST Certified Agreement 2002–2005* was certified by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. The new agreement promotes DEST as an employer of choice, offering both competitive remuneration and flexible terms and conditions that allow balance between work and life responsibilities. The new agreement was

the product of a process that reflects the department’s belief in valuing its people through open consultation. It was developed in the knowledge that trust, fairness and collaboration are essential to achieving our vision. It contains clear guidance and direction for employees and managers alike, and helps to foster a working environment and employee framework that will support creativity, innovation and achievement.

Our agreement reflects the primary value held by the department, that people are our most important asset. Staff demonstrate their dedication, professionalism and commitment on a daily basis. At DEST it is understood that staff are motivated in their work by both personal satisfaction and a sense of pride in service to the public. They will choose to stay in an organisation that allows them to grow both personally and professionally. This climate engenders a sense of wellbeing and high morale. People will choose to stay in DEST and grow, on the basis of what they can learn, the support they receive, the quality of feedback they receive, and the opportunities that will arise from good leadership.

All in the department are expected to demonstrate leadership qualities, regardless of level, and regardless of whether they are dealing with ministers, the Parliament, the Australian public or with each other.

One of the things that has struck me about the best leaders in DEST is that those around them exhibit two characteristics, loyalty and creativity. In this sense the best leaders are inspirational, they draw people to them, they are optimistic and they can see the ‘big picture’. They are able to make links between their work and the broader agenda of government.



At DEST, leadership is also about inclusiveness, tolerance and teamwork. Since my arrival I have noticed a real openness and willingness by individuals to work cooperatively across a range of issues in the department. This willingness is captured in our philosophy, 'Open for Business'. It is evident in the way we engage in celebrations such as National Aboriginal Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week with awards, competitions, ceremonies and a speaker's series. It is evident in the energy, enthusiasm and widespread support for the social club.

It is also seen in our celebration of cultural difference in respect to Indigenous employment where there is an emphasis on seeking, recruiting and retaining Indigenous staff. Yarrangi is an aboriginal word meaning 'belonging to us' from the Gooniyandi language, which is spoken in the Fitzroy Crossing area of Western Australia. Yarrangi is DEST's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recruitment and Career Development Plan, and what that means to DEST staff is an inclusive approach to relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous DEST employees. It encapsulates our commitment to cultural diversity.

Canberra bushfires

The Canberra bushfires brought out the strong sense of community that we always knew existed in the National Capital – everyone wanted to help. That same spirit was evident in DEST with staff across the department offering to assist in a myriad of ways. They were generous not only with donations, but with offers of accommodation for people and animals, goods and supplies and counselling. The department allowed staff time to look after their own circumstances, as well as time to support family and others in the community.

Departmental staff monitored the local radio and relayed updates from emergency services and Federal Police through the staff messages system on the Intranet.

About \$13 000 was raised for staff members who lost their houses in the fires by direct donation and through the efforts of the social club, which also collected donations to the broader Canberra appeal.

Working for the future – challenges for DEST

The commitment to do whatever it takes to get the job done was particularly noticed in the lead-up to the measures announced in the 2003–04 Budget, with many months of hard work put in by many people across the department. This Budget was one of the biggest for this portfolio with 49 separate Budget measures.

Education and training are a priority, and the next 18 months present enormous challenges in terms of policy issues and implementation tasks arising out of the Budget:

- ▶ the implementation of higher education reforms — these are critical to the future of higher education;
- ▶ the implementation of an international education package to ensure we have a diverse and sustainable education export industry;
- ▶ development of a national policy framework for education — in response to the high priority that the Australian Government has placed on education, with a target of 2010 to lead Australia's eight different educational jurisdictions to nationally consistent education provision which prepares all students to be capable and engaged world citizens;

- ▶ improvement of education results for Indigenous Australians — part of the COAG agenda and one which is increasingly focusing on youth transitions issues;
- ▶ preparation for quadrennium funding arrangements for school education and Indigenous education — this will require negotiations with states and territories, non-government education authorities and Indigenous education providers, for arrangements to apply for 2005–2008 for new school and Indigenous education legislation and agreements; and
- ▶ negotiation of the Australian National Training Authority agreement — DEST is working with the states and territories to develop a forward-looking agreement for 2004–2006. It will focus on improving quality, addressing skills shortages, and increasing innovation, and will reflect the key objectives of the next National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training for the period 2004–2010.

We also have transitions before us:

- ▶ On 1 July 2003, Questacon, the National Science and Technology Centre, was transferred from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts to DEST. Questacon will bring an important new dimension to activities across the Education, Science and Training portfolio. Both DEST and Questacon were delighted with this move, as it enables us to work together to promote science and technology awareness and education. Questacon's mission of 'making science fun and relevant for everyone' is one that fits very closely with DEST's aim to enhance and strengthen Australia's science base, and scientific research and innovation capability.
- ▶ The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) will cease to operate on 30 September 2003, and its current functions will be transferred to DEST. This move will more strongly align the Commonwealth's initiatives relating to young people's transitions from school to work and community life.
- ▶ Work is required on youth transitions, to link up and streamline initiatives relating to transitions from school to work or to further study, to support young people in obtaining vocational learning opportunities while they are at school, and to aid them in developing a career plan.


The benefits of research, science and innovation are important to us all. As I said earlier, DEST will be focusing on the future agenda for research, science and innovation (beyond the current work of implementing *Backing Australia's Ability*), including:

- ▶ the mapping of Australia's science and innovation system;
- ▶ implementation and enhancement of the national research priorities;
- ▶ development of a national research infrastructure strategy;
- ▶ establishment of greater collaboration between public sector research agencies and universities;
- ▶ evaluation of the Australian Government's 1999 Knowledge and Innovation Statement and its impact on our research funding and training arrangements; and
- ▶ evaluation of *Backing Australia's Ability* as a whole.

All of these will be important inputs to the considerations of the Ministerial Committee

on Science and Innovation, chaired by the Prime Minister, in developing the next stage of research, science and innovation policy in Australia.

Personal message – Conclusion



I am very pleased to have joined DEST, and grateful to the staff for their support since I joined the department in March. I must acknowledge the professionalism, commitment, loyalty and support of DEST staff to each other and to their work. With the high calibre of DEST staff we are well placed to implement the huge agenda before us and to support our Ministers in their efforts to ensure that education, science and training benefit all Australians.

On behalf of my DEST colleagues I commend our *2002–03 Annual Report* to you.