

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Customer Service Review

August 2004



**92-96 LISBURN ROAD,
BELFAST BT9 6AG**

TEL: (028) 9050 0800



**19 BEDFORD STREET,
BELFAST BT2 7EJ**

TEL: (028) 9032 2861



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1. Executive Summary

1.1 OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The overall aim of the research study was:

“To gather the views of DARD’s external customers on the current delivery of services, highlighting any gaps in this provision, outlining future requirements and provide recommendations to DARD’s steering group that will inform future strategy and improvements”

The methodology used combined both qualitative and quantitative techniques. A series of face-to-face depth interviews with a wide range of DARD’s customers was followed by a large-scale telephone survey conducted with respondents from across DARD’s customer base. A series of questions were also included on an Omnibus and asked of the general public. The questions related to forest parks’ usage and awareness of rural development schemes,

In total, 79 depth interviews and 986 telephone interviews were conducted with DARD’s customers (including DARD students and Forest Service customers), and 1,023 interviews with the general public.

1.2 OVERALL SATISFACTION

Overall satisfaction with the service provided by DARD among Agriculture Primary Producers (APPs), those in the ancillary and processing sectors, fishing, and rural communities is 72% (20% very satisfied). This is relatively low compared to other Government Departments in GB and NI and against the target levels these Departments set themselves. Overall, 13% are dissatisfied with the service provided, rising to over one in five among customers in the Rural Community and Fishery sectors.

Issues that DARD should consider to improve customer satisfaction in terms of its service delivery in the future relate to:

- the methods of contact with customers;
- the handling of complaints and appeals;
- its communication with customers;
- the administration of funding; and
- generally managing customer expectations better

Among students at DARD colleges, 87% were satisfied with the course and the same percentage with the college they attended. Among those customers who had dealt with the Forest Service in the last three years, 92% were satisfied with the service they received.

1.3 METHOD OF CONTACT WITH CUSTOMERS

At present contact tends to be mainly via telephone and face-to-face (with the exception of Fisheries customers where post is predominant). However, for those customers who contacted DARD by telephone one in five had difficulty reaching the correct point of contact.

Only 18% of customers visit a local DARD office at least once a month and 73% rate the service as good. There is a huge variation in the offices visited, with some (e.g. Enniskillen and Omagh) being visited by large numbers and others not registering at all in the survey. This suggests that there may be an opportunity to provide a wider range of more specialist services at fewer offices.

In future 35% of customers would like to have more contact with DARD via computer (while two thirds of students would like more on-line learning).

1.4 HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Twelve percent of customers have made a complaint against DARD in the last three years and a further 12% feel that they should have. Some complaints will be due to outcomes (e.g. refusal of grant) which DARD cannot easily change. However, it is important for DARD to communicate well with its customers and to manage expectations better in this area.

More worryingly, almost two thirds of customers were dissatisfied with the handling of their complaint overall. This strongly suggests that the current complaints' procedure should be looked into.

Just 5% of forest service customers had made a complaint against DARD in the last three years.

1.5 ADMINISTRATION OF FUNDING

There is a wide variation in the rating of the process for the administration and delivery of funding. This again may be outcome related to a certain extent, but there is an opportunity to look at the process for Environment-related grants (which score highly) and how this varies to Rural Development and Crops and Livestock funding to see whether lessons can be learned. Again, there may be the need for improved customer communication and improved management of customer expectations.

1.6 COMMUNICATION

Of the two-thirds of customers who have not participated in any DARD courses, 16% claimed none were relevant and 14% were unaware of courses available. This again suggests that more could be done to let customers know what is available and to communicate the provision better. Also, DARD may need to look at providing more options in relation to flexible learning.

In addition, from the general public survey in relation to forest parks, two thirds of all respondents felt uninformed about activities and events going on in forest parks, again a clear communication issue and potential area for improvement.

In order to communicate more effectively with customers, DARD may also need to improve and combine its various separate customer databases.

Better communication is a common issue across a range of topics and the whole way in which DARD communicates with its customer base should be closely examined.

Closely linked to communication, is the issue of managing customer expectations. This is one far-reaching area that DARD should look at and improve, given that it was highlighted frequently by customers in relation to a number of issues.

2. Preface

Report: **CUSTOMER SERVICE REVIEW**

Prepared for: **DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL
DEVELOPMENT**

Date: **AUGUST 2004**

2.1 BACKGROUND

The aim of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is:

“To promote sustainable economic growth and development of the countryside in Northern Ireland by assisting the competitive development of the agri-food, fishing and forestry sectors, being both proactive and responsive to the needs of consumers for safe and wholesome food, the welfare of animals and the conservation and enhancement of the environment”.

In pursuit of this Aim, and in line with the four themes underlying the concept of sustainability, the Department's Strategic Priorities and Desired Outcomes are:

Priority 1: To improve the economic performance of the agri-food, fishing and forestry sectors.

Desired Outcomes:

- Adaptation of the agri-food, fishing sectors to cope with greater exposure to market forces;
- Improvements in efficiency and quality in the agri-food fishing and forestry sectors.

Priority 2: To protect the public, animals and property.

Desired Outcomes:

- The food chain within DARD's remit is as safe as possible;
- The welfare of animals is safeguarded;
- The risk of flooding is reduced.

Priority 3: To conserve and enhance the environment.

Desired Outcomes:

- Damage to the rural and marine environments is reduced;
- The amenity value of the rural and marine environments is increased.

Priority 4: To strengthen the economy and social infrastructure of disadvantaged rural areas.

Desired Outcomes:

- The differential in economic performance between disadvantaged rural areas and other rural areas is reduced;
- Social disadvantage is reduced compared with other rural areas.

As well as its internal customers, DARD has a number of external customer categories. These categories include:

- Agricultural Primary Producers (APP)
- Processing, Manufacturing and Ancillary Providers
- Rural Community Groups
- Fishing and Aquaculture customers
- Forestry customers
- Politicians, Local Councils
- General Public/consumers
- Education and Training Establishments
- Agri-Food Industry Representative bodies
- Community Funders

It is within this context that DARD commissioned a survey aimed at gathering the views, attitudes and opinions of these external customers on its current service provision.

The survey serves to inform the Customer Services Review Team (Steering Group) on the views, attitudes and opinions of DARD's external customers on the provision of DARD's services.

MORI Ireland and Deloitte were awarded the contract. This document addresses the attitudes and opinions of DARD's external customers on current customer service provision by analysing findings from a range of customer surveys (described more fully elsewhere) carried out by MORI Ireland. This document, while stand-alone, was also used to aid and guide Deloitte in the production of their report.

As indicated above, Deloitte have produced an accompanying report which highlights a Customer Service Improvement Action Plan for DARD and makes recommendations on procedures to monitor the effectiveness of the Action Plan.

3. Research Objectives

The overall aim of the research study was:

“To gather and present the views of DARD’s external customers on the current delivery of services, highlighting any gaps in this provision, while outlining future requirements and providing recommendations to DARD’s steering group that will inform future strategy and improvements”

Other specific objectives were:

- To identify the types of services and interaction that DARD’s external customers desire at present and in the future;
- To ascertain levels of awareness and satisfaction with current DARD services;
- To establish a baseline for future monitoring/benchmarking and identify potential future improvements of the customer service delivery by DARD;
- To define new service standards for DARD and to identify ways of modernising service delivery;
- To provide a basis for the development and implementation of DARD’s Customer Service Improvement Action Plan to be compiled by Deloitte;
- To make recommendations on procedures to monitor the effectiveness of the Action Plan, again developed by Deloitte.

4. Scope of the Research Study

There were a number of key component parts to the overall research study. These are outlined below:

- Depth Interviews (79 across all customer areas, used to help formulate and inform the questionnaire for the main customer survey and also to uncover other insights);
- Main Customer Survey (comprising 851 computer-assisted telephone interviews with those in the APP, Ancillary, Rural Communities, and Fisheries sectors);
- Forest Service Survey (comprising 75 interviews with customers of DARD's Forest Service);
- Student Survey (60 interviews with students at the College of Food Agriculture and Rural Development (CAFRE));
- General Public Survey (1,023 interviews with a representative sample of the Northern Ireland population).

5. Research Methodology

In order to best address the objectives of the project, a two-stage programme of research, comprising both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, was undertaken.

5.1 STAGE 1 – CUSTOMER DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Stage 1 involved 79 depth interviews with customers across the following categories.

Customer Type	Number of Depth Interviews
Agriculture Primary Producers	20
Processing, Manufacturing and Ancillary Sectors	16
Rural Community/Community Funders	8
Education and Training Providers	7
Fishing and Aquaculture	3
Forestry	5
Politicians	4
Local Government	5
Agri-Food Industry Representative Bodies	11
Total	79

DARD provided databases of names and addresses for each customer category and all those customers were written to in advance informing them of the purpose of the study and informing them that MORI Ireland would be contacting them in the near future. Customers were also given the opportunity to opt out of the survey at this stage.

Following the letters, and in accordance with the breakdown of interviews per customer category, potential respondents were contacted by telephone and invited to take part in a depth interview. A date and suitable time was arranged with the customer and they were called back on the day of the interview to confirm details. All interviewing was carried out on a face-to-face basis (usually at the respondent's place of work or home) by an experienced MORI Ireland executive, using a topic guide covering a wide range of relevant topics agreed in advance with DARD. A different topic guide was used for each customer category. Each interview lasted on average between 45 minutes and one hour.

A number of telephone depth interviews were conducted with other customer groups, including representatives from Section 75 categories.

The depth interviews were used to identify and highlight the key issues in relation to service provision for each customer group and to inform the development of the questionnaire to be used in the subsequent large-scale quantitative telephone survey. For a number of customer categories, where customer numbers were lower, a depth interview approach only was used. These categories were politicians, local government,

education and training establishments (although a dedicated student survey was conducted), and agri-food industry representative bodies.

5.2 STAGE 2 – CUSTOMER TELEPHONE SURVEY

Stage 2 was a large-scale survey of customers using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) approach. Interviews were achieved in the following numbers (agreed in consultation with DARD) across the following customer categories.

Customer Type	Number of Telephone Interviews
Agriculture Primary Producers (APP)	500
Processors/Ancillary Sector	165
Rural Community/Community Funders	125
Fishing/Aquaculture	61

In order to provide a more robust sample size for Fishing and Aquaculture; Rural Community; and Processing, Manufacturing and Ancillary Sectors, these were over-represented as a proportion of the total number of interviews (and proportion of the actual customer base), while the Agriculture Primary Producers group was under-represented. Corrective weighting was applied at the post-interviewing stage to adjust to DARD's actual customer profile and farm type.

The questionnaire used for interviews in these sectors included common core questions to allow for analysis across categories, but also specific questions relating to the specific customer category. Question areas were chosen after consultation with DARD and from findings emanating from the depth interviews. Each interview lasted, on average, 20 minutes.

A pilot study consisting of 22 interviews was conducted in order to gauge and test the questionnaire for flow, meaning, and sense. Following feedback from these pilot interviews, the final questionnaire was developed after consultation between MORI Ireland and DARD.

5.3 OTHER SURVEYS

In addition to the above, a dedicated survey was conducted among students of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) , and also among customers of the Forest Service. 60 and 75 interviews respectively for each of these categories were conducted, again using CATI.

A number of questions relating to rural development programmes and forest parks were placed on MORI Ireland's monthly Omnibus. 1,023 interviews were conducted on a face to face basis with a representative sample of the general public in Northern Ireland.

In terms of fieldwork dates, the depth interviews were conducted between October 2003 and January 2004. The telephone surveys ran from 24th November 2003 to 4th March 2004, while interviewing for the Omnibus was conducted between 21st November and 11th December 2003.

The key findings from each of these surveys are provided in the following sections of this report.

6. Main Customer Survey – Breakdown of Sample

For the main telephone customer survey, there were four distinct sectoral customer categories. Each category contained a range of subgroups. 851 interviews were achieved across these groups. The full list, and number of interviews achieved in each category, is provided below:

AGRICULTURE PRIMARY PRODUCERS (N=500)

Comprising those involved in the following types of farming and activities:

- Dairy
- Cereals
- Cattle and Sheep
- Small C&S
- Pigs
- Poultry
- Horticulture: Fruit
- Horticulture: Veg
- Potatoes
- Mushrooms
- Equines

PROCESSING, MANUFACTURING AND ANCILLARY SECTORS (N=165)

Comprising:

- Food Manufacturers
- Importers/Exporters/Livestock Traders
- Meat Plants (pigs, poultry, red meat)
- Marts
- Private Veterinary Practices (PVPs)
- Equine Industry Related

RURAL COMMUNITY/COMMUNITY FUNDERS (N=125)

Comprising:

- Managers of Rural Support Network
- Leader II funding recipients
- BSP funding recipients
- Community Based Regeneration Projects
- Peace II farmers groups
- Peace II local delivery companies

FISHING AND AQUACULTURE (N=61)

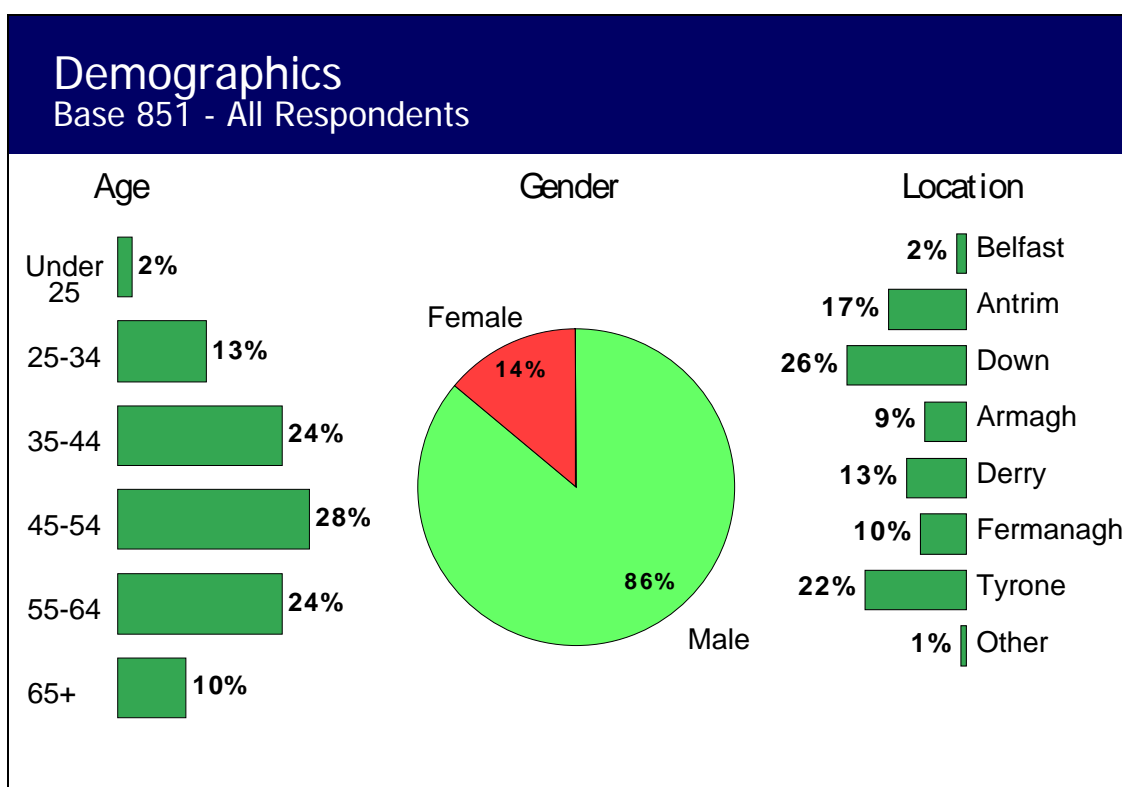
Comprising those involved in:

- Aquaculture
- Fishing Organisations (ANIFPO and NIFPO)

7. Main Customer Survey – Demographics

The demographic make-up of the sample for the main customer survey in terms of gender and age; economic status; and household age structure and mean household size for each area is shown in the following charts and tables.

Almost two thirds of the overall sample (62%) were aged 45 or over. The vast majority of customers were male (86%), and there was a spread of locations. The profile of the overall sample is shown below:



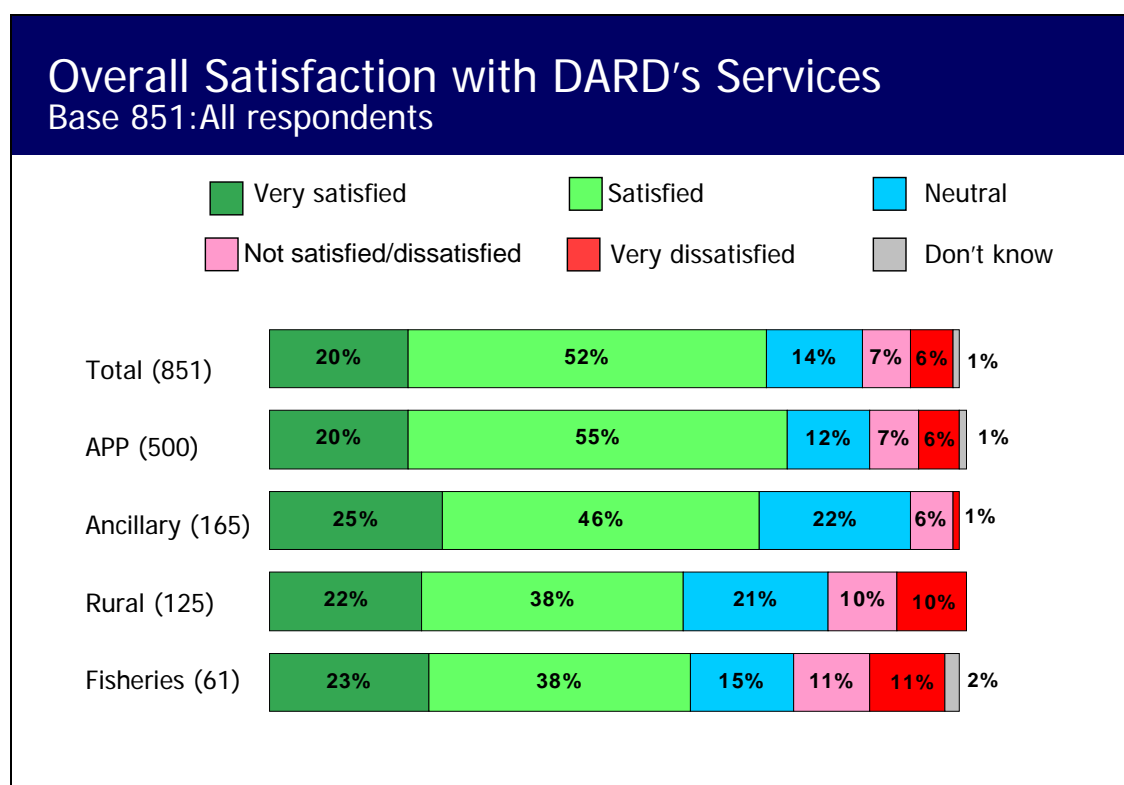
8. Main Customer Survey – Analysis

8.1 SATISFACTION WITH DARD

- Overall satisfaction with DARD
- Correlation Analysis and Strategic Priorities Analysis

8.1.1 OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH DARD

In terms of satisfaction levels, almost three-quarters of all customers (72%) are satisfied with the service provided by DARD, comprising 52% who are “satisfied” and 20% “very satisfied”. Overall, 13% of customers are dissatisfied, with this dissatisfaction figure rising to 22% among fisheries customers and 20% among rural community customers.



In the APP sector, those in smaller firms (4-40 employees) are significantly more satisfied with DARD's services than those in larger firms (40+ employees), with 77% compared to 66% indicating they are satisfied with the service received.

This compares to other customer satisfaction surveys conducted recently in Northern Ireland by MORI Ireland, which found that:

- 91% of DVTA customers were satisfied with test procedures and 88% were satisfied with the experience of their driver or vehicle test.
- 63% of applicants and 79% of solicitors were satisfied with the overall quality of service provided by the Compensation Agency.

Also, in Great Britain, across all Government Departments and Agencies, overall satisfaction with service is 86%.

8.1.2 CORRELATION ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES ANALYSIS

In order to provide greater insight into the most important components of overall DARD service, one can investigate the relative performance of a specific attribute on overall perceived satisfaction, by asking how satisfied customers are with various aspects of service and seeing how well each correlates with overall satisfaction.

Correlation Analysis is a fairly critical and objective way of determining which aspects are key to service users. An apparently simpler way of extracting this information would be to ask people directly on their perceived importance on each aspect. This would very much be influenced by the “front of mindedness” issues which occur (e.g. most employees saying that “Pay” is the most important aspect of job satisfaction). With Correlation Analysis, we investigate what it is about the people that are most satisfied with a service that makes them different from those who are the least. In a staff survey, one might find that those who are made to feel that their input is worthwhile are considerably more satisfied overall than those whose work is not valued. Those who are satisfied with their pay, for example, may only be marginally more satisfied with their job overall than those who are not satisfied with their pay, hence we could say that “Work being valued” is a Key Driver of overall satisfaction, whereas “Pay” is not.

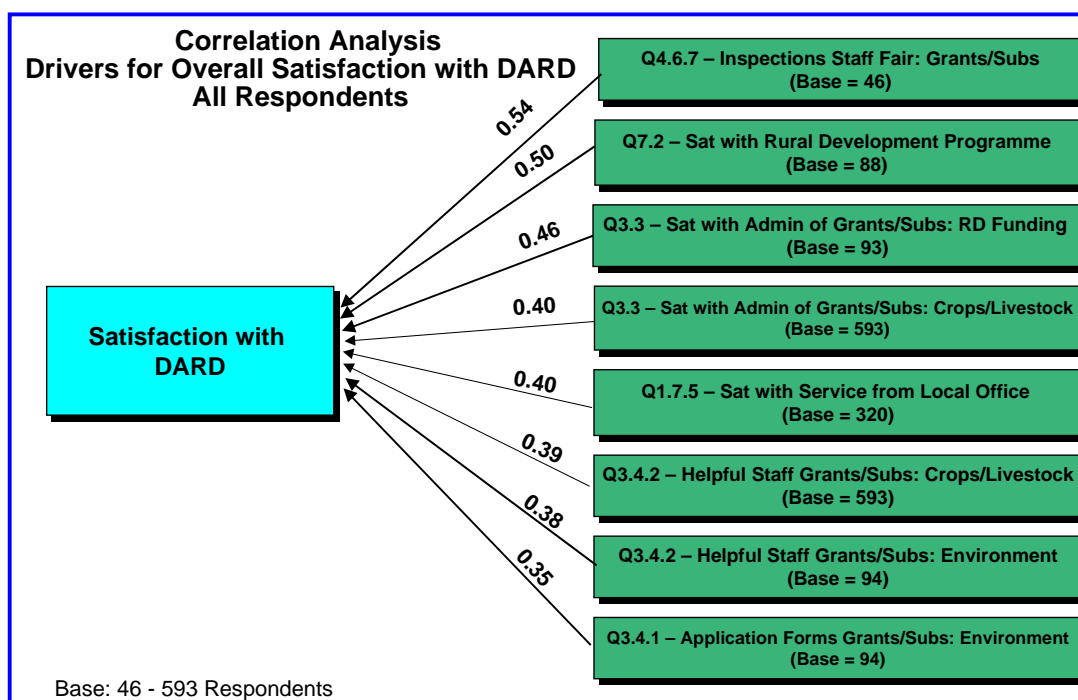
The Strategic Priorities chart (SPA) plots for each aspect, importance (from the KDA results) against performance (in this case, mean satisfaction score, scaled between 0% and 100% where all respondents award the best and the worst possible scores respectively). It can flag-up aspects in the lower right quadrant which are important drivers of overall satisfaction, but where people are not as satisfied with that as with other areas of service. We often open up the possibility for the client to focus efforts on improving these aspects foremost.

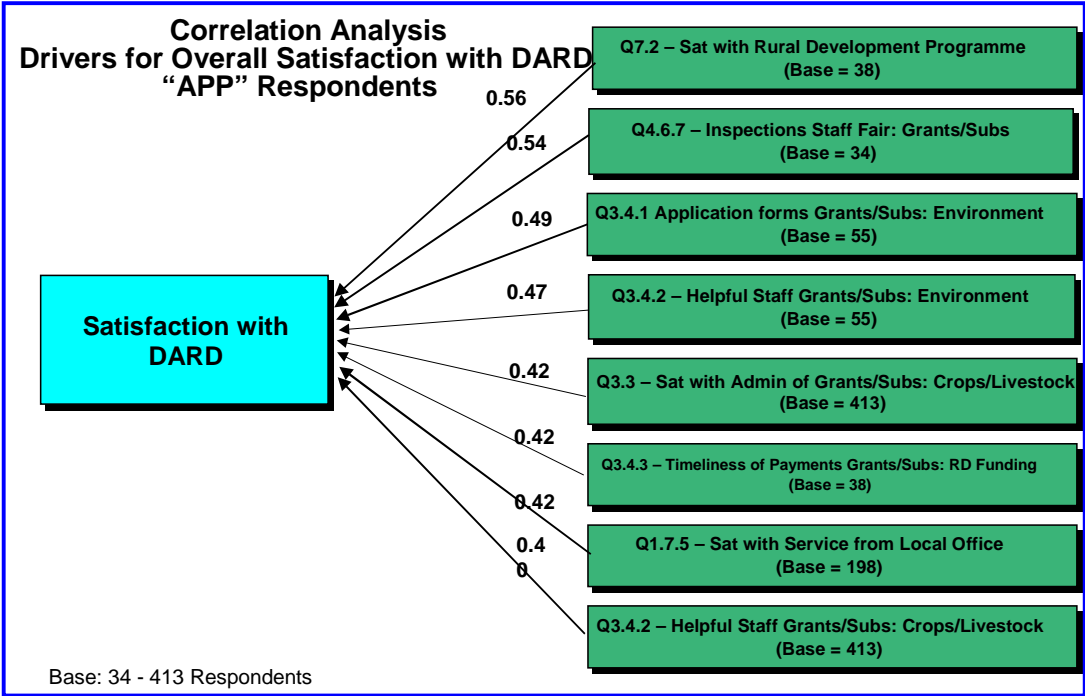
Correlation Analysis and Strategic Priorities Analysis (SPA) have been run for:

- All Customers
- “APP” Customers Only

8.1.2.1 CORRELATION ANALYSIS

The eight most important aspects contributing to overall satisfaction have been highlighted in charts below, as have more detailed charts focussing on a greater number of aspects. The figures on the arrows are the Correlation coefficients and show how strongly that aspect distinguishes the people who are the most satisfied overall from those who are the least. It shows association, but not causality. Correlation, rather than formal multiple regression has been run owing to limited sample sizes and extensive filtering, which are different for each question.





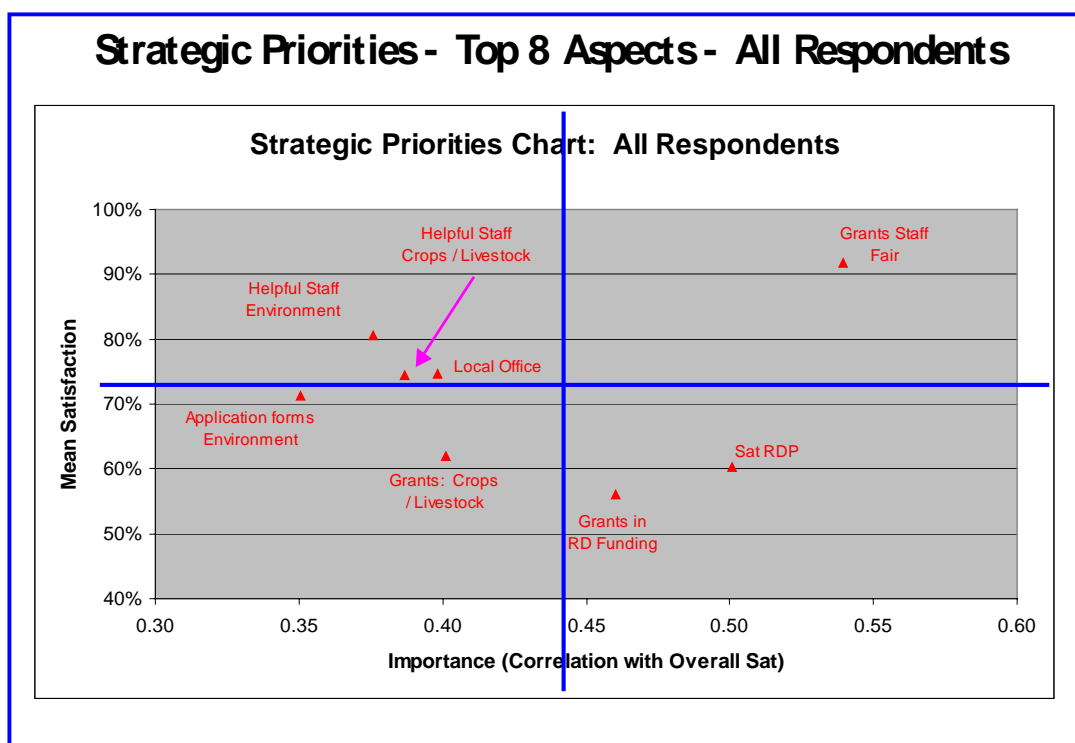
8.1.2.2 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES ANALYSIS (SPA)

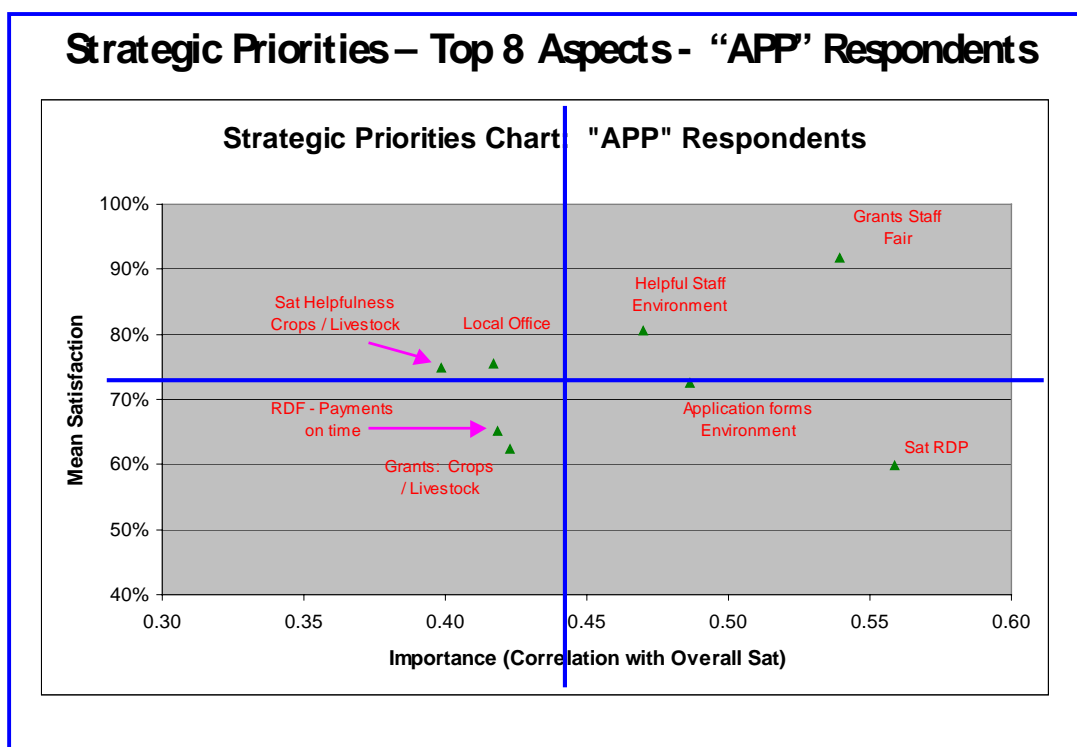
Top 8 Aspects

With the SPA, importance (from the correlation analysis) is plotted against performance or mean satisfaction. The blue lines represent the mean importance and satisfaction scores of all aspects. The SPA charts show relative importance for the eight points - those points are the eight most important ones.

As can be seen when the charts are extended to cover a longer list, there are a number of others falling to the left of these and the mean satisfaction and mean importance scores (signified by the blue lines) changes significantly.

With the SPA Chart (below), we can see that the aspect which is the most strongly related to Overall Satisfaction with DARD (Fairness of Grants Staff), is also attracting very high satisfaction scores (91% - mostly very satisfied). It is recommended that DARD should highlight this. The next strongest driver (i.e. The Rural Development Programme) is in the lower right quadrant of the SPA Chart, and is not attracting as high satisfaction scores (mostly neither / nor's) as other aspects of services. It is recommended that this should be considered a priority area for improvement. Essentially anything in the top right quadrant is a strength and driving satisfaction, while anything in the bottom right quadrant is an area for improvement as it also has a strong impact on overall satisfaction. Those in the top left quadrant are areas of strength but not strong drivers of overall satisfaction and those in the bottom left quadrant are areas of weakness but not strong drivers of overall satisfaction.





All Aspects

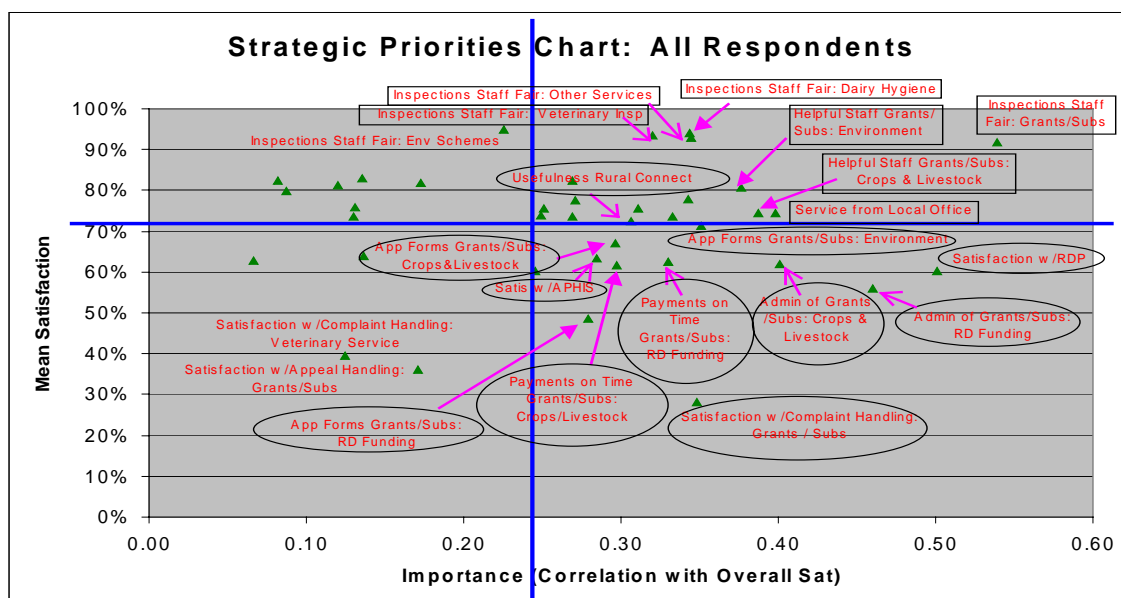
Going beyond the eight top aspects also reveals some interesting findings. The blue line intercepts are the averages for each and give a good indication of the quadrants. These are scaled such that a mean satisfaction of 100% means that all customers would have given the best possible ratings to that question, and 0% means the worst possible ratings. The top left quadrant indicates those areas which customers are broadly satisfied with but are not important contributing factors to overall satisfaction. The bottom left of the quadrant includes those factors which customers are not as satisfied with but do not correlate strongly to overall satisfaction levels.

Factors in the top right of the quadrant (e.g. the Fairness of the Inspections Staff relating to Grants and Subsidies/Funding, are those which customers are satisfied with and also strongly correlate to (and are important drivers of) overall levels of satisfaction. These are issues which DARD should continue to focus upon and keep at these high levels.

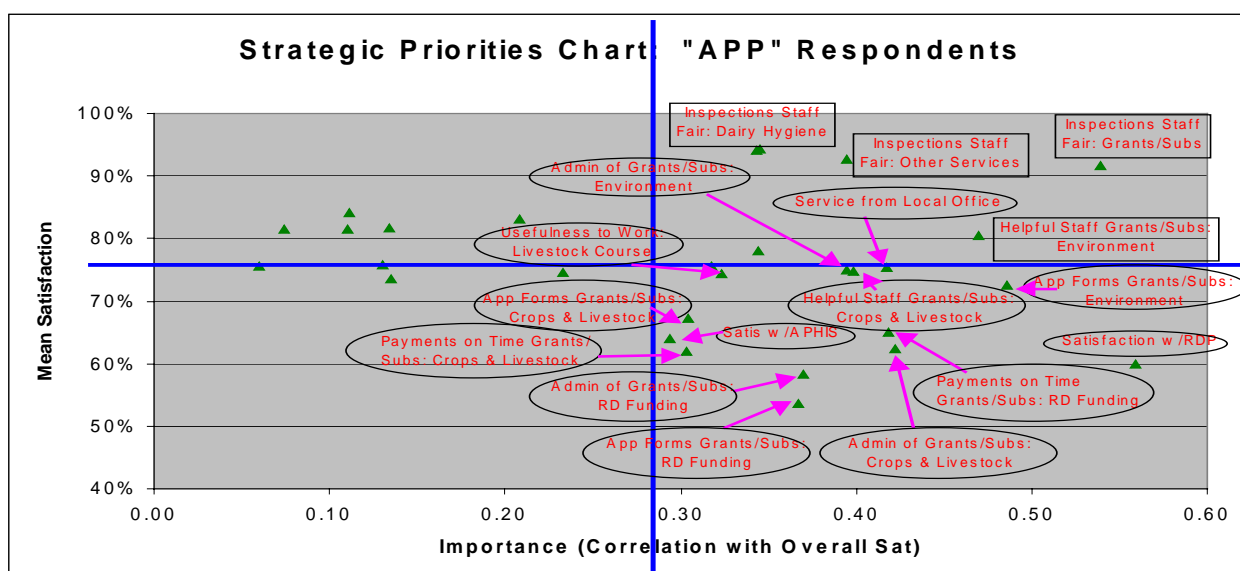
Aspects which are in the lower right of the charts (e.g. Satisfaction with the Rural Development Programme) are ones which are important but satisfaction levels on these

are not to the standard of others. DARD should consider focusing its priorities on improving these issues, in order to improve overall satisfaction levels. The most relevant are highlighted with circles in the following charts.

Strategic Priorities – All Aspects - All Respondents



Strategic Priorities – All Aspects - “APP” Respondents



8.2 CUSTOMER INTERACTION

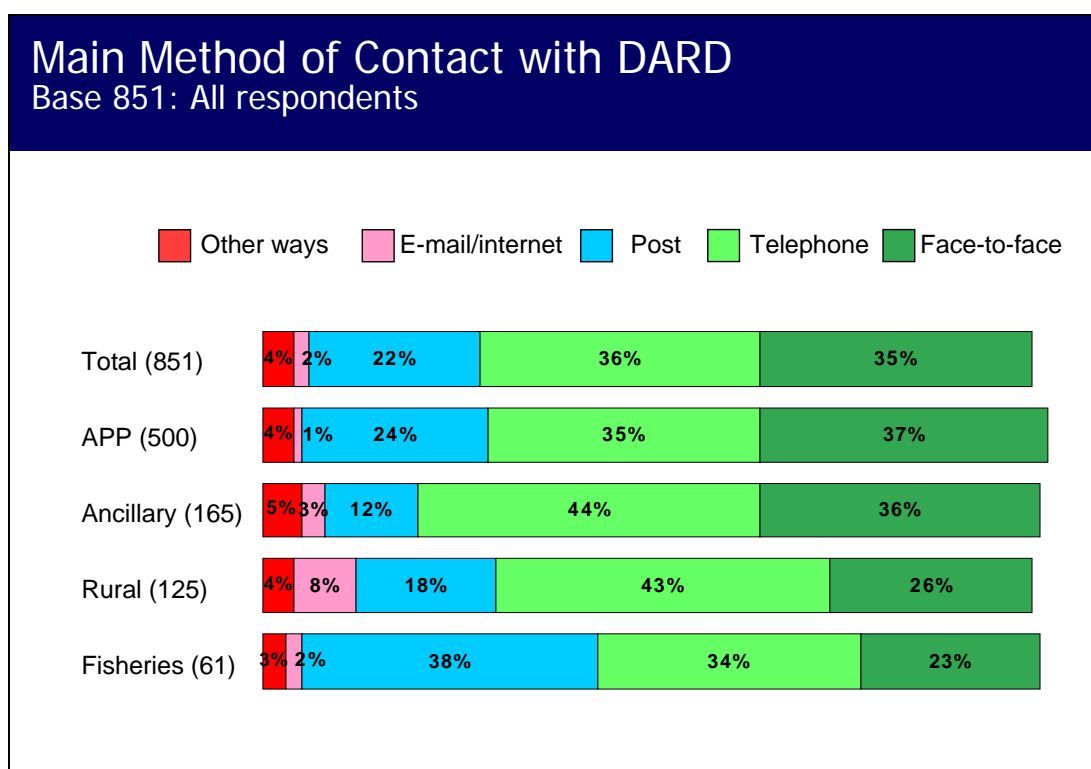
- Contact with DARD
- Inspections
- PC/Website Usage

8.2.1 CONTACT WITH DARD

8.2.1.1 METHODS OF CONTACT

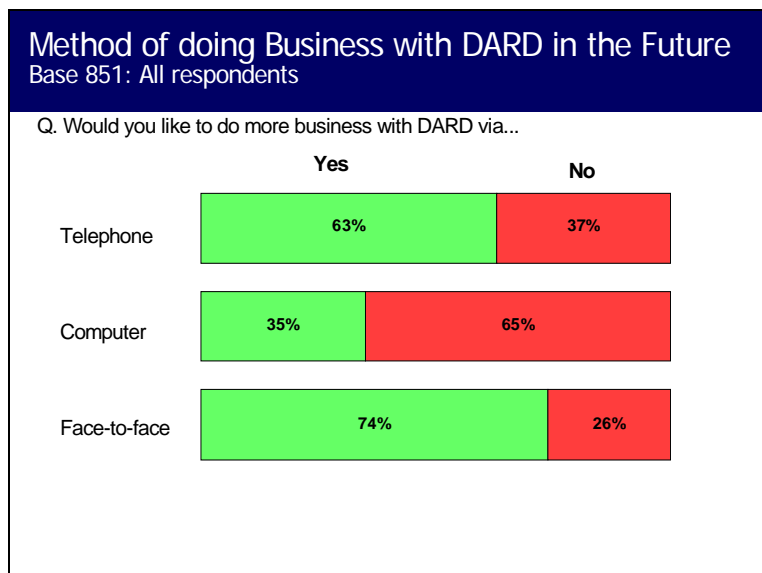
Overall, the main methods of contact with DARD are by telephone (36%), or on a face-to-face basis (35%). However, there are some differences by the type of customer, with telephone being the preferred method among ancillary customers and those in rural communities. Fisheries customers are more likely to contact DARD by post, whereas APPs are almost equally divided between face-to-face and telephone contact.

The full range of responses are shown in the table below:



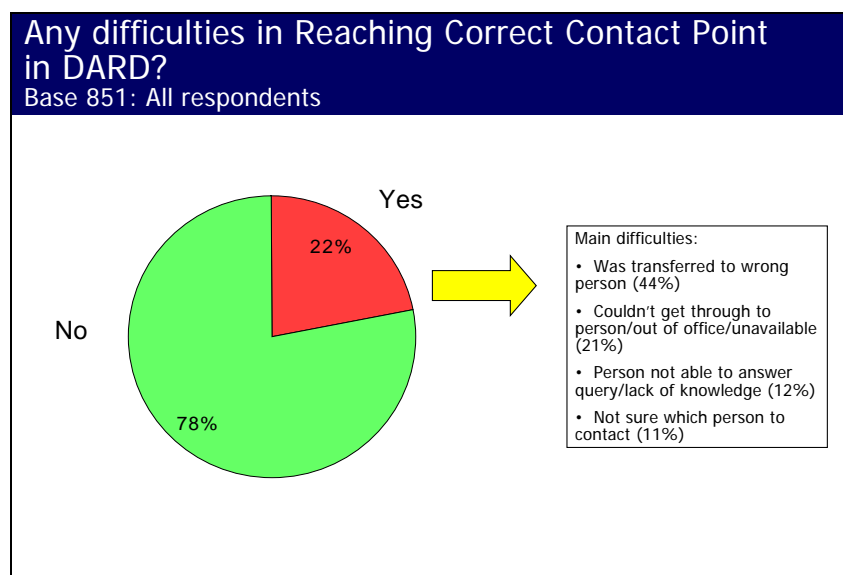
8.2.1.2 FUTURE CONTACT WITH DARD

Customers were asked if, in the future, they would like to do more business with DARD via telephone, computer or face-to-face. Just over one-third of all customers indicated that they would like to do more business with DARD via computer in the future, rising to 53% among those in the ancillary sector and 78% of those in the rural community sector.



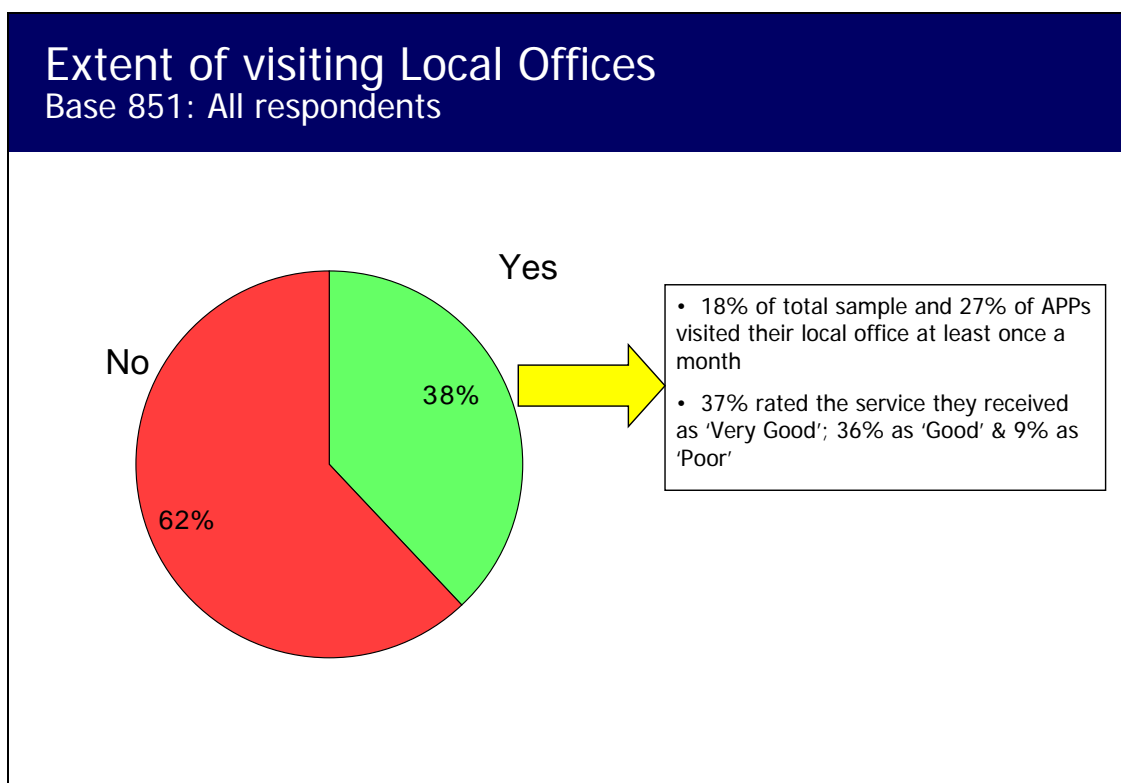
8.2.1.3 DIFFICULTIES IN REACHING CORRECT CONTACT POINT IN DARD

Over one in five customers stated that they have experienced difficulties in the reaching the correct point of contact in DARD in the last 12 months. This figure rose to 31% among customers in the ancillary sector. The main difficulties are highlighted below:



8.2.1.4 LOCAL OFFICES

38% of all customers have visited a DARD local office. Almost three-quarters of these rate the service received as good, with 37% rating it as “very good”. 9% rate the service received as “poor” or “very poor”, the main reason given being the unhelpfulness of staff.



18% visit their local office once a month or more frequently, rising to 27% among APP customers.

Of those who visit local offices, there is a wide disparity in which offices are visited. Of those who have visited a local office, 18% have been to the DARD office in Enniskillen, while 16% have visited the Omagh office in Sperrin House. 7% have been to the offices on the Newry Road, Armagh and Downpatrick. Visits to the other offices are low, with many visited by 1% of customers or fewer. Most of those visiting the offices tended to live in the same county.

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The full range of offices and percentages visiting are shown in the table below:

OFFICE	% VISITING
Enniskillen	18
Omagh (Sperrin House, Sedan Ave)	16
Armagh (Newry Road)	7
Downpatrick	7
Ballymena (Kilpatrick House, High Street)	6
Newry (Glenree House, Carnbane Ind Estate, Springhill Road)	6
Armagh (Mall West)	5
Dungannon	5
Coleraine	4
Newtownards (Robert St)	4
Ballymoney	3
Magherafelt	3
Newry (Holts Building, Cecil St)	3
Newtownards (Portaferry Rd)	3
Strabane	3
Banbridge	2
Kilkeel	2
Ballyclare	1
Ballymena (ECOS Centre)	1
Belfast (Annex 5, Castle Grounds, Stormont)	1
Cookstown	1
Kesh	1
Larne	1
Londonderry (Orchard House, Foyle St)	1
Maghera	1
Omagh (Hospital Rd)	1
Limavady	0.5
Lisburn	0.5
Portadown	0.5
Ballygawley	0
Belfast (Magnet House, York St)	0
Lisnaskea	0
Londonderry (Crown Buildings, Asylum Rd)	0
Newcastle	0
Newtownhamilton	0
Plumbridge	0
Trillick	0

8.2.1.5 REASONS FOR VISITING THE LOCAL OFFICE

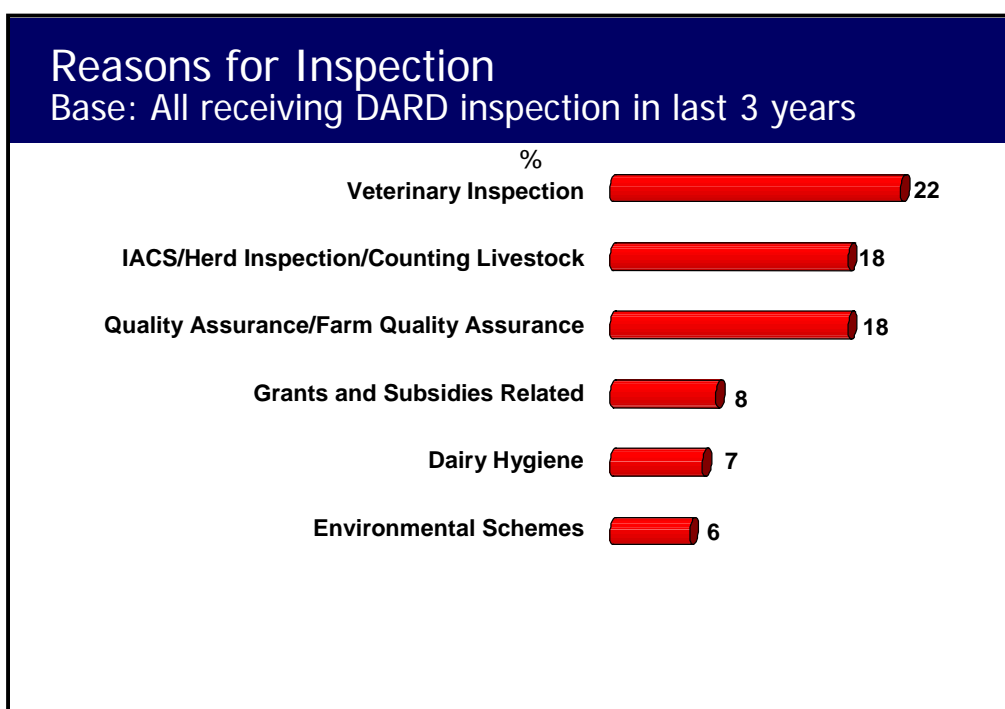
The main reason for visiting a local office was in relation to Funding issues, mentioned by 7 in 10. Almost two thirds have visited to obtain general information; while 60% have visited in relation to a veterinary issue. Just over half have visited to obtain technical or business information or advice, while almost one third (32%) have visited to obtain information on Rural Development.

8.2.2 INSPECTIONS

8.2.2.1 RECEIVING INSPECTIONS

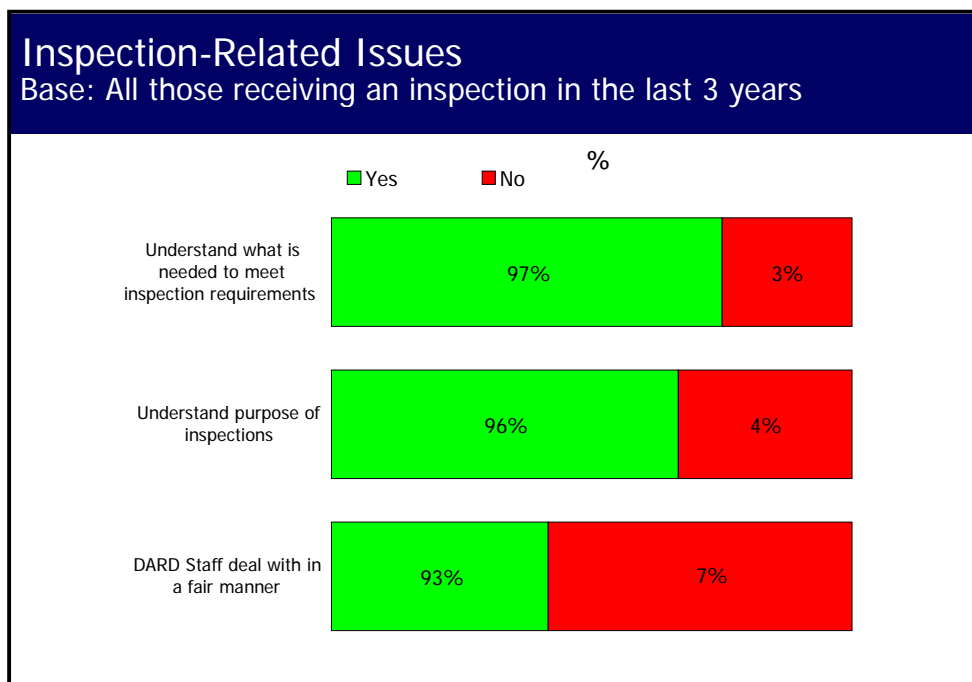
71% of customers in these sectors indicated that they have received inspections from DARD in the last three years.

The main reasons for inspections are veterinary inspections, Quality Assurance related and inspections relating to the Integrated Administration and Control System (**IACS**) and herd inspections. The most commonly mentioned are highlighted in the chart below:



8.2.2.2 INSPECTION-RELATED ISSUES

96% of those who received an inspection understood the purpose of inspections; 97% understood what they needed to do to meet inspection requirements; and 93% stated that DARD staff had dealt with them in a fair manner.



8.2.3 PC AND WEBSITE USAGE

Almost two thirds (64%) of those in the APP, Rural Communities and Fisheries sectors have a PC at home. Of these, 52% have used it to access the Internet, falling to 44% among those in the APP Sector.

Of those who have accessed the Internet:

- 58% have accessed the main DARD Website
- 38% have accessed Rural NI (Rural Portal) Website (57% among those in the Rural Communities sector). Among those who had visited this Website, the main reason were: to obtain general information (mentioned by 54%); to register births/deaths on APHIS (38%); and 15% to get information on funding.
- 37% have accessed the Rural Development Programme Website (70% among those in the Rural Communities sector)
- 8% have accessed the Fisheries Website (62% among those in the Fisheries sector)
- 6% have accessed the Forest Service Website

12% of those who have accessed the Websites wanted to see changes or additions to them. The main changes sought are to the main DARD and Rural NI Websites. The changes customers want are better or more frequent updates to the sites, and faster and easier access and navigation around the sites.

8.2.4 CUSTOMER INTERACTION – SUMMARY

The main methods of contact with DARD are by telephone or face-to-face. Fisheries customers are most likely to be in contact via post. Over one third of customers would like to do more business with DARD via computer in the future.

Over one in five customers had experienced difficulties in reaching the correct contact point in DARD, the main reasons being that they were transferred to the wrong person or the person they were looking for was unavailable.

Over one third of customers have visited a local office, with most rating the service received as good. There is a wide disparity in offices visited. Most visited are the Enniskillen and Omagh offices, while many were visited by very few. The main reasons for visiting were in relation to funding issues, or to obtain general information.

Almost three-quarters of customers have received inspections from DARD in the last three years, the main reasons being veterinary inspections or in relation to IACS or Quality Assurance.

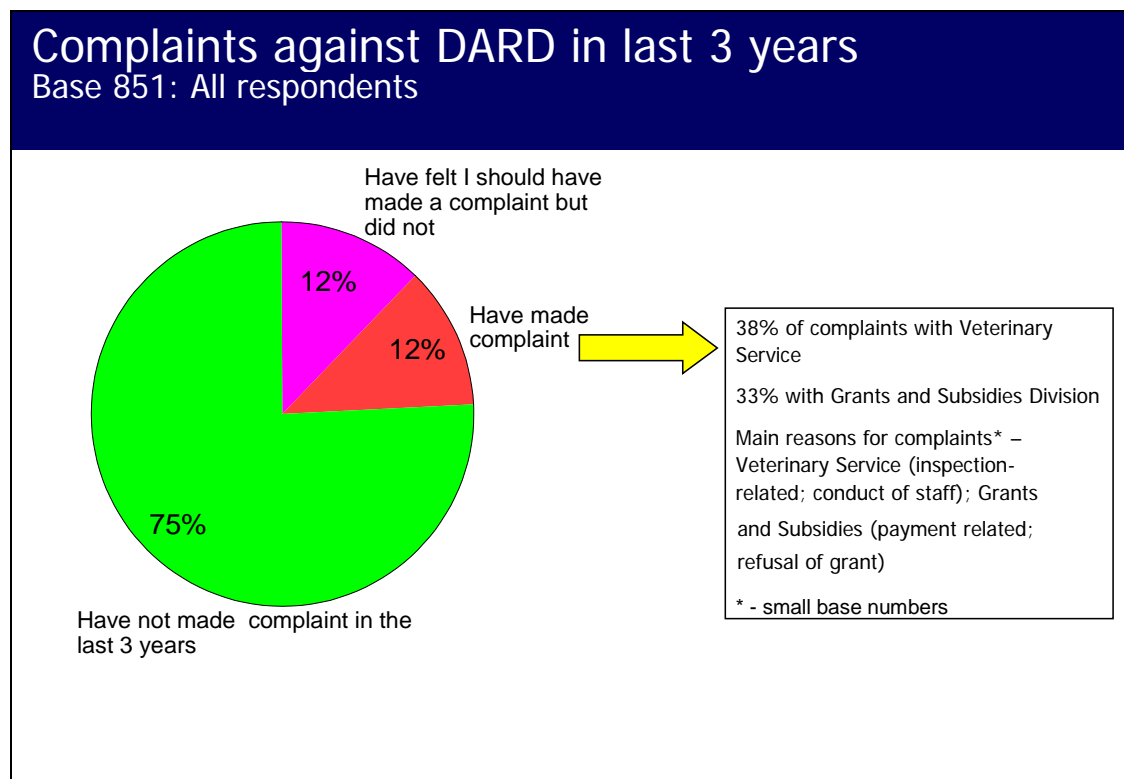
8.3 CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- Complaints and Appeals
- Funding
- Education and Training
- Advice, Technology Transfer and Research
- Rural Development
- Agri-Environment Schemes
- Veterinary Service
- Fisheries

8.3.1 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

8.3.1.1 COMPLAINTS

12% of customers have made an appeal against DARD in the last three years, rising to 17% among those in the ancillary sector. However, a further 12% felt they should have made a complaint but have not. This means that almost one in four of DARD's customers have felt cause to complain in the last three years.



Of those who have made a complaint, 38% made it against the Veterinary Service, while 33% did so against Grants and Subsidies Division (rising to 39% among APP customers). The main reasons for the complaint against the Veterinary Service related to the conduct of staff or were inspection-related, while against Grants and Subsidies Division the main reasons were in relation to late payment, or refusal of grant. Complaints were made against other areas of DARD but in much smaller numbers.

58% of all customers are aware that DARD has a Complaints Procedure.

8.3.1.2 SATISFACTION WITH THE HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS

Customers may complain about issues which are outside of DARD's control, such as refusal of grant. However, how a complaint is handled is well within DARD's control. This is an area in which DARD did not perform well as almost two-thirds of customers (65%) who have made a complaint are dissatisfied with how it has been handled. Therefore there is strong scope for improvement.

By functional area, 60% have been dissatisfied with the handling of their complaint by the Veterinary Service and 72% with Grants and Subsidies Division. The main reasons for customer dissatisfaction with complaint handling are that they have received an unsatisfactory explanation or outcome, or that the staff are rude and inflexible and do not know what they were doing.

8.3.1.3 APPEALS

9% of customers have made an appeal against decisions made by DARD in the last three years. Of those who have made an appeal, half made it against decisions made by Grants and Subsidies Division, the primary reason being due to the rejection of an application for Grants/Subsidies. 16% appealed against a decision made by the Veterinary Service.

Of all those who have made an appeal, 60% have been dissatisfied with the handling of the appeal, with this figure rising to 64% and 89% respectively among those who have made appeals against decisions made by Grants and Subsidies Division, and the Veterinary Service. This also indicates an area which DARD could focus on improving.

8.3.2 FUNDING

Four in five of all customers have received funding from DARD in the last three years. This rises to 87% of APPs, falling to 35% among those in the ancillary sector and 18% of those in fisheries.

Of those receiving funding, 88% are Crops and Livestock related, 14% are to do with Rural Development funding, and 14% are environment-related. 4% are forestry-related, and the same proportion relates to the Marketing of Quality Agricultural Products (MQAP).

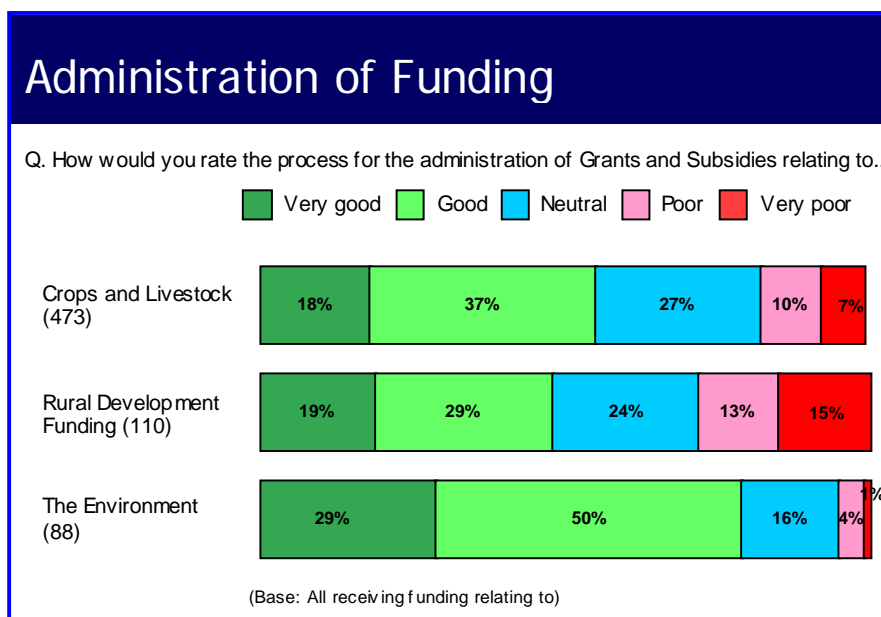
8.3.2.1 ADMINISTRATION OF FUNDING

At an overall level, 21% rate the process for the administration of funding as “very good”, and a further 36% as “good”. 7% rate the process as “very poor” and 9% as “poor”.

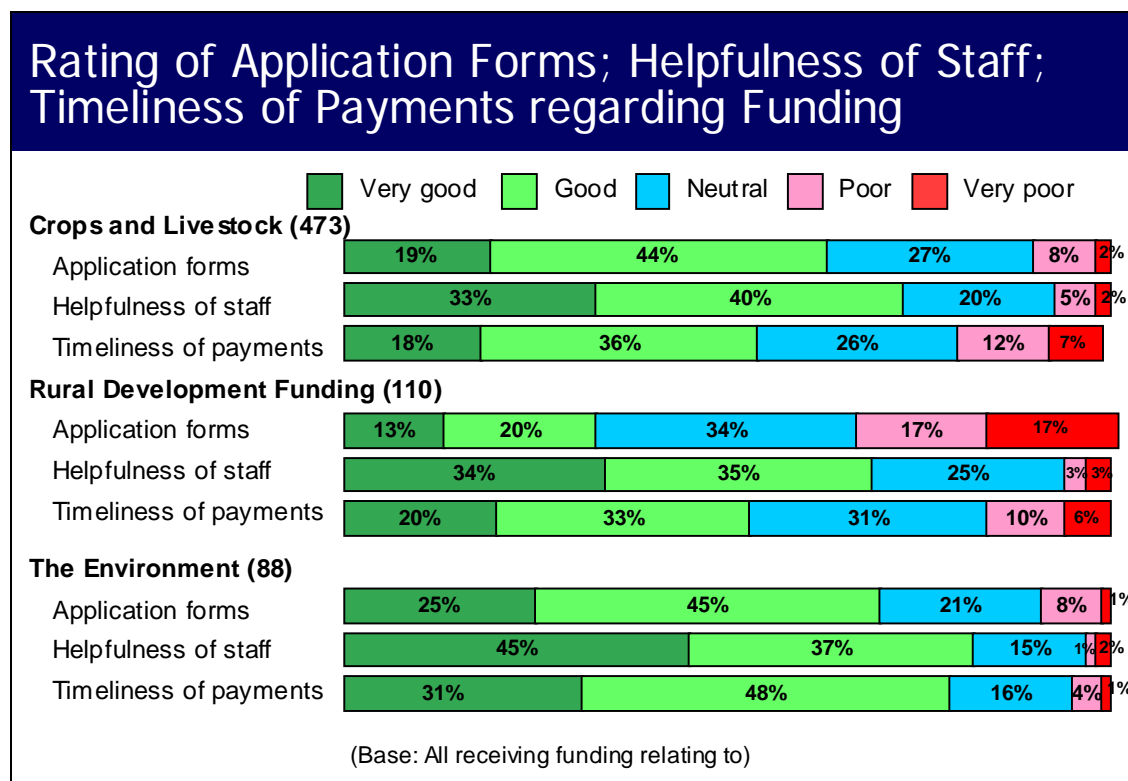
For those receiving crops and livestock grants, over half (55%) rate the administration as good (made up of 18% who believe it to be “very good” and 37% “good”). 17% rate the administration of these grants as poor (10% poor, 7% very poor), the main reasons being the amount of bureaucracy and red tape involved and slow or late payments.

Almost half (48%) of those in receipt of Rural Development funding rate the process for administration as good (19% feel it is “very good” and 29% “good”). However, over a quarter of customers (28%) believe the process is poor (with 13% rating it as “poor” and 15% “very poor”). The main reason is the amount of bureaucracy, red tape and administration involved.

The administration of grants relating to the environment rate much higher with 79% rating the process as good (comprising 29% “very good” and 50% “good”). Just 5% rate the process as poor.



Those receiving funding were asked to rate the application forms, helpfulness of staff, and timeliness of payments for each. The figures are presented in the chart below:



8.3.2.2 APPLICATION FORMS

At an overall level covering all funding received, 19% rate the application forms for funding as “very good”, and a further 40% as “good”. 4% rate the process as “very poor” and 9% as “poor”.

The three most applied-for funding are focussed upon as they have the most robust sample sizes. In terms of application forms relating to these specific areas, 70% of those in receipt of environmental grants rate the process as good (comprising 25% “very good” and 45% “good”), with 9% rating it as poor or very poor.

Almost two thirds (63%) of those receiving Crops and Livestock grants feel the application forms are good (19% “good”, 44% “very good”), with 10% “poor” or “very poor”. In terms of improving the process, the most common suggestion is to simplify the forms and make them easier to understand, and to generally cut down on the number of forms.

However, for those receiving rural development funding, just one third (33%) feel the application forms are good (13% “very good” and 20% “good”), while a further third (34%) rate them as poor (17% as “very poor” and 17% “poor”). The most common suggestions for improvement are again to make the forms simpler to understand and to reduce the paperwork, administration and bureaucracy involved.

8.3.2.3 HELPFULNESS OF STAFF

Levels of satisfaction with the helpfulness of staff were generally quite high. At an overall level, three quarters of customers (75%) rate this aspect as good, while just 6% rate the helpfulness of staff as “very poor” and 4% as “poor”.

Levels of satisfaction are high amongst all funding areas, with the environment again coming out with slightly higher satisfaction levels with 82% rating helpfulness of staff as “good” or “very good”.

8.3.2.4 TIMELINESS OF PAYMENTS

At an overall level, 21% rated the timeliness of payments as “very good”, and a further 37% as “good”. 6% rated the timeliness of payments as “very poor” and 11% as “poor”.

For the specific grants, 54% of those receiving crops and livestock grants or subsidies rated the timeliness of payments as good, with 19% rating this aspect as poor (12% as “poor” and 7% “very poor”). The main suggestion for improvement is to make payments quicker. Other common suggestions are to reduce bureaucracy and red tape, and to make one overall payment.

It was a similar story for those in receipt of Rural Development funding, with just over half (53%) rating timeliness of payments as good and 16% as poor (10% “poor” and 6% “very poor”). The main suggestion for improvement was to pay quicker.

Satisfaction levels are much higher in this regard among those receiving environmental grants, with 79% of whom rating this as good (31% “very good” and 48% “good”), with just 5% rating it as poor or very poor.

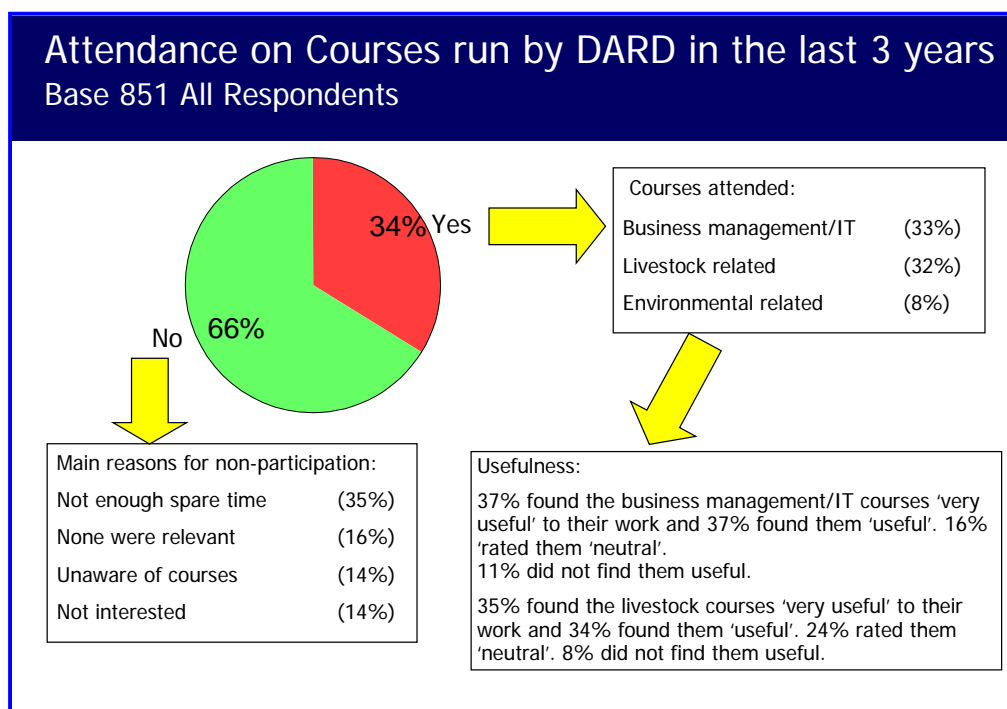
8.3.2.5 ONLINE APPLICATION FOR FUNDING

Almost half of customers (47%) stated they would be likely (22%) or very likely (25%) to use the online application facility for funding. This rose to 78% among rural customers (59% very likely and 19% likely) and 65% among those in the ancillary sector (36% very likely and 29% likely).

43% of customers indicated they would be unlikely (15%) or very unlikely (28%) to use the online application facility.

8.3.3 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Customers were asked if they have attended any courses provided by DARD in the past three years. Just over one-third indicated that they have attended such courses, rising to over half of customers in the rural community sector.

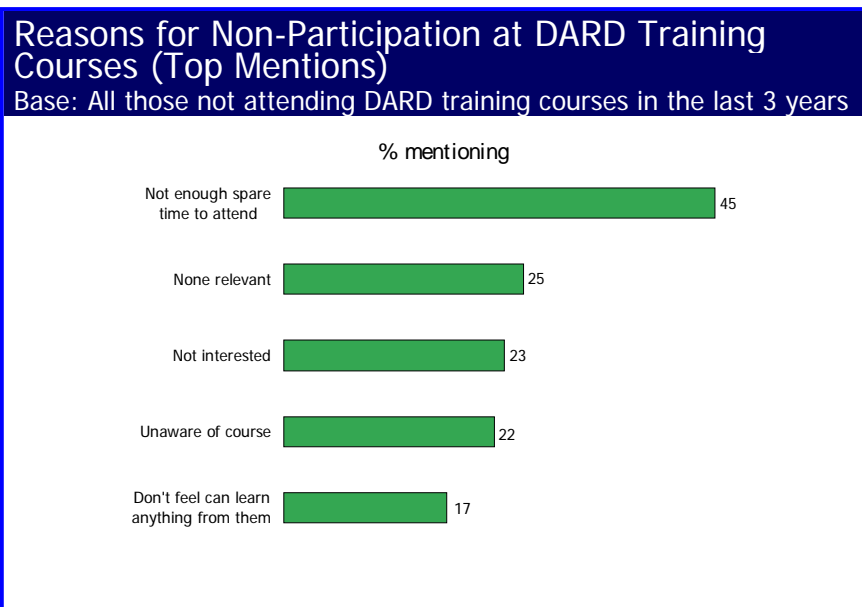


Of those who did attend courses, 33% have attended business management and IT courses and 32% livestock-related courses. 8% and 6% respectively have attended courses relating to the environment and health and safety.

At an overall level, almost three-quarters found the course or courses that they attended had been useful to their work. Just 9% had felt they were not useful, the main reasons surrounding the content of the course and the fact that they knew most of it already.

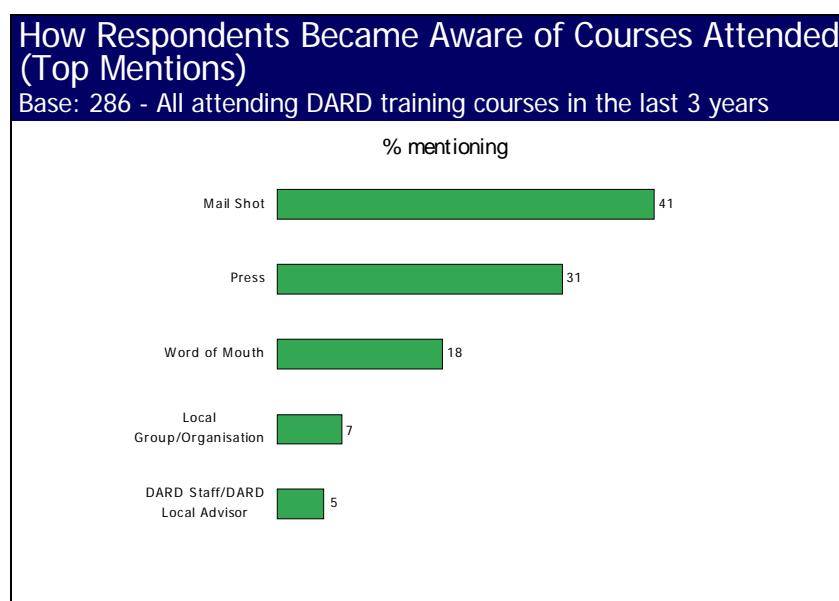
For the most popular courses, 73% and 69% respectively have found the business management/IT courses, and livestock courses useful.

For those who have not attended courses provided by DARD in the last three years, the most commonly cited reasons for non-participation is that they did not have enough spare time to attend. Other reasons for non-participation are highlighted in the chart below:



8.3.3.1 AWARENESS OF COURSES

Those who attended courses were asked how they had heard about them. The main ways were via a mail shot, or through the press, while word of mouth was also commonly cited. The full range of responses is shown in the table below:



8.3.3.2 SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

All customers were asked how, if at all, DARD's training course provision could be improved. While 29% of all customers did not feel that the training provision could be improved, a number of suggestions for improvement have been put forward. The most common of these are:

- to receive more information about courses (9%);
- to hold them at a more convenient location (8%);
- greater/more relevant subject areas (6%);
- to hold courses at more appropriate times (5%);
- to have more practical/ "on-farm" courses (5%); and
- to have more advance notice of courses (4%).

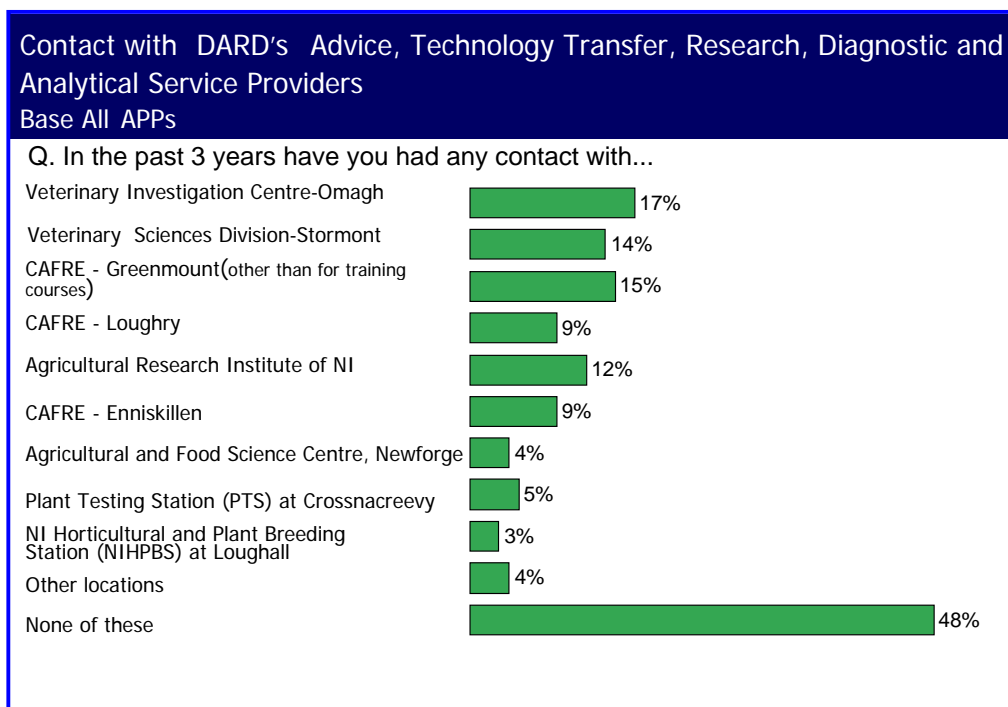
8.3.4 ADVICE, TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER, RESEARCH, DIAGNOSTIC AND ANALYTICAL SERVICES

Almost half of all customers (49%) have had contact with DARD centres offering advice, technology transfer, research and diagnostic and analytical services. This figure rose significantly to 86% among those in the ancillary sector, where there was much greater contact with such centres.

At an overall level, the most commonly contacted locations are:

- Veterinary Investigation Centre at Omagh (contacted by 16% overall and by 17% of APPs and 24% in the Ancillary Sector);
- Veterinary Sciences Division at Stormont (which has been contacted by 14% of customers overall and 36% among those in the ancillary sector);
- Greenmount, which has been contacted by 14% of customers (and by 24% of Ancillary Sector customers and 15% of those in the APP sector); and
- Loughry which has been contacted by 12% of customers overall (rising to 47% among those in the ancillary sector).

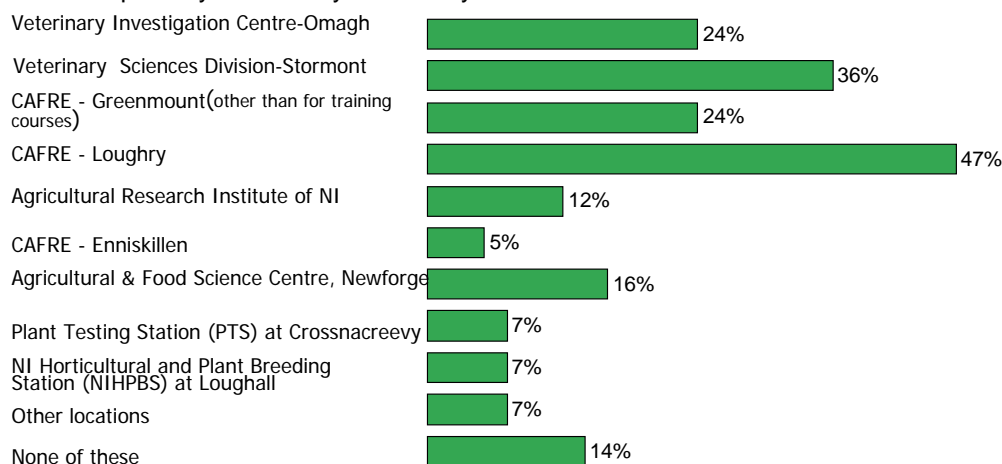
The full range of responses by APP and Ancillary sectors are shown in the charts below:



Contact with DARD's Advice, Technology Transfer, Research, Diagnostic and Analytical Service

Básé: Áilín Añcillary/Processing Sector

Q. In the past 3 years have you had any contact with...



8.3.4.1 REASONS FOR CONTACT – MOST COMMONLY CONTACTED CENTRES

Veterinary Investigation Centre

Of those who have contacted the Veterinary Investigation Centre at Omagh, 69% did so for diagnostic/analytical services, while 14% did so for post-mortems on the death of an animal or animals.

Veterinary Sciences Division

83% contacted the Veterinary Sciences Division for diagnostic/analytical services.

CAFRE - Greenmount Campus

Almost one third (31%) of those who contacted Greenmount did so to receive or ask for advice, while 23% have contacted the Campus in relation to an open day or demonstration (for other than training purposes).

CAFRE - Loughry Campus

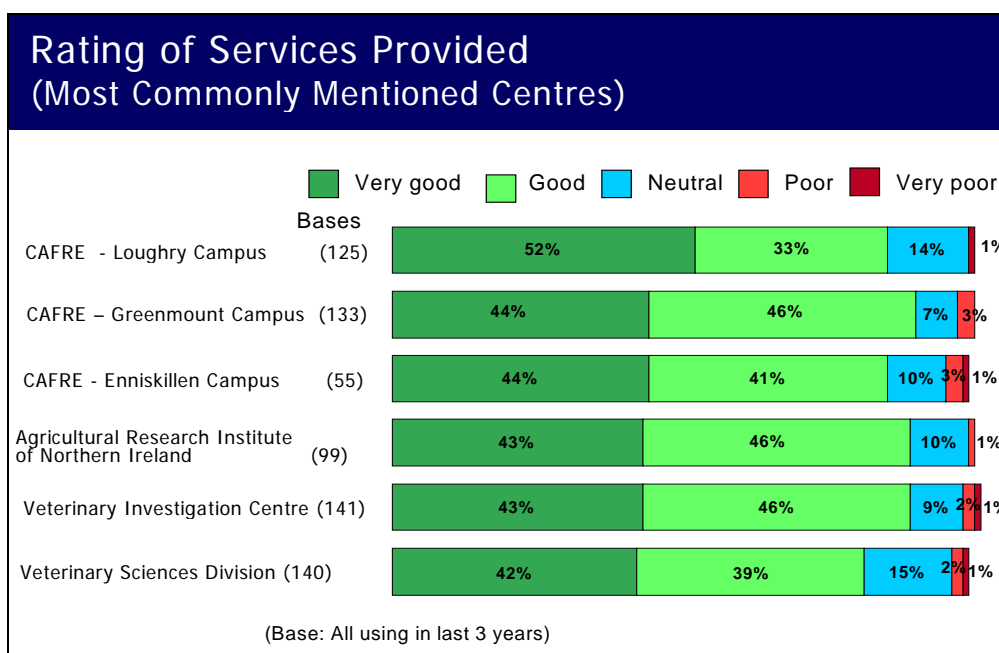
30% of those who contacted Loughry did so for advice while 27% contacted the Campus regarding a course, training, or a seminar.

Agricultural Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ARINI)

Over one quarter (27%) of those who contacted ARINI have done so for diagnostic or analytical services, while 25% have done so for advice.

8.3.4.2 RATING OF SERVICES – MOST COMMONLY CONTACTED CENTRES

Those who have used the services provided by the centres were asked to rate them. Each came out well, with Loughry rating particularly highly, with over half of customers scoring the services provided as “very good”. The ratings for each of the most commonly used centres are shown in the following chart:



8.3.5 RURAL DEVELOPMENT

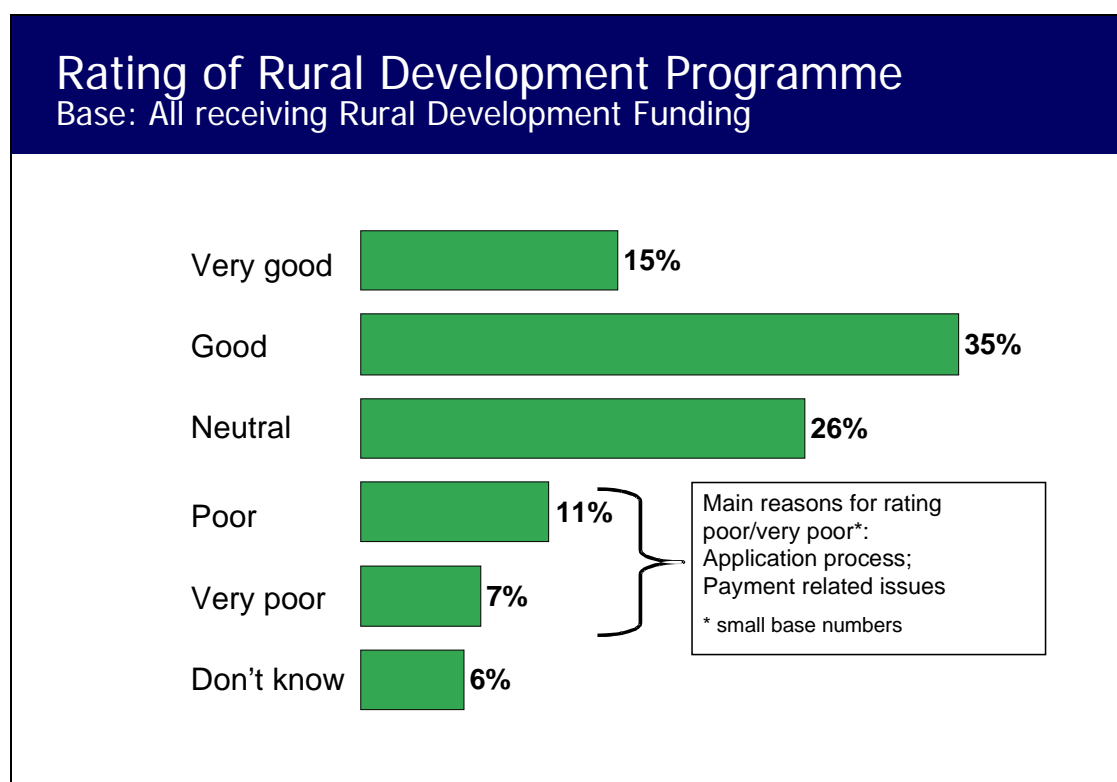
Those who indicated that they have received Rural Development funding (14% of those receiving a grant or subsidy; 11% overall) were asked questions relating to the funding and their overall experiences of the programme.

8.3.5.1 RURAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

Of those who have received Rural Development funding, 43% had done so on an individual basis. 22% have received funding as part of a group of people with a similar interest (e.g. a buying group or local farmer group), while 17% have received funding as part of a group of people with a similar interest, through the Rural Development Council or Rural Community Network or another such organisation.

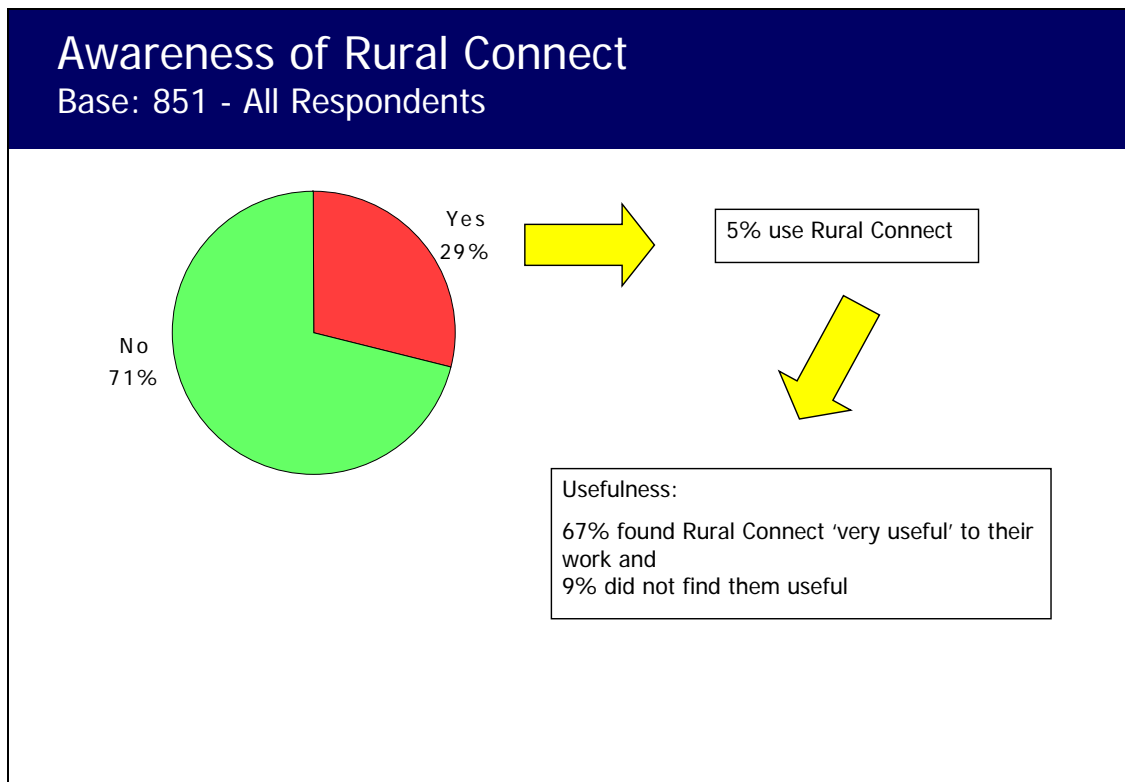
8.3.5.2 OVERALL EXPERIENCES OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Those who have received funding were asked to rate the overall Rural Development programme. Half rate the programme as “good” or “very good”, while almost one in five rate the programme as “poor” or “very poor”. Of those who rated it poor, the main concerns revolved around issues relating to the application process, and payment.



8.3.5.3 RURAL CONNECT

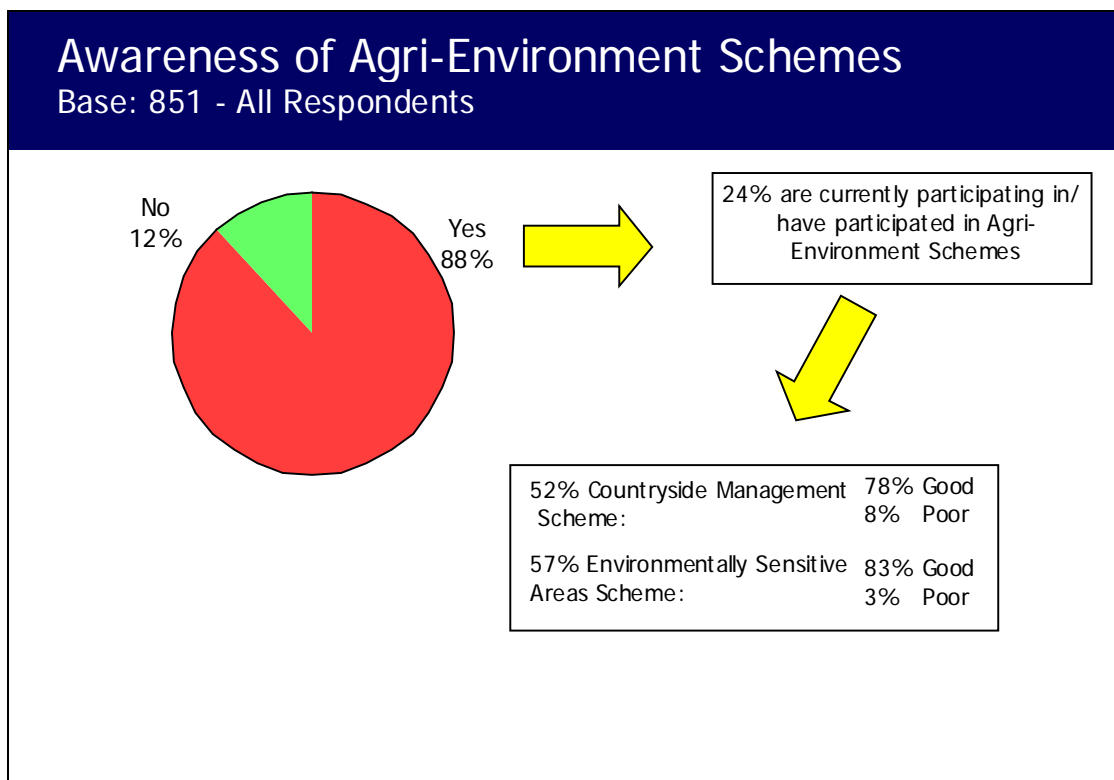
At an overall level, 29% of all customers are aware of the Rural Connect service (rising to 44% among those in the “Rural Communities” sector), however just 5% have actually used the service, rising to 23% among those in “Rural Communities”.



Those who have actually used the service were asked how useful they found it. 34% have found the service “very useful”, while a further third have found it “useful”. 9% felt the service was not useful (including 3% who felt it was not at all useful).

8.3.6 AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEMES

All customers in the APP sector were asked a series of questions relating to Agri-Environment schemes.



8.3.6.1 AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION IN AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEMES

88% of those in the sector are aware of DARD's Agri-Environment Schemes. Almost one quarter (24%) of those in the sector are currently participating in (or have participated in) Agri-Environment schemes. Of those, 52% and 51% respectively are currently participating in (or have participated in) the Countryside Management Scheme (CMS), and Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) scheme.

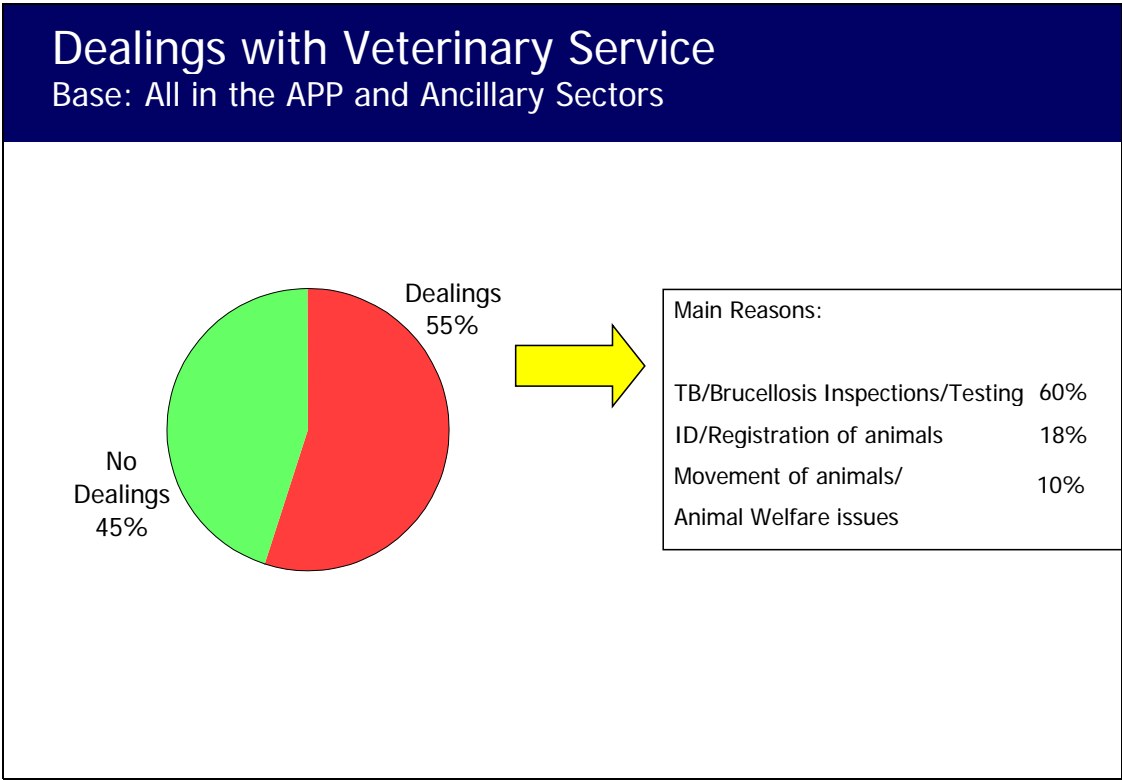
8.3.6.2 RATING OF AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEMES

83% of those on the ESA scheme rated it good (comprising 36% who felt it was "very good" and 47% who rated it "good"), with just 3% rating it as poor. This is slightly higher than the 78% of customers on the CMS who rated it good (35% as "very good" and 43% as "good"), with 8% rating the scheme as "poor".

8.3.7 VETERINARY SERVICE

8.3.7.1 DEALINGS WITH VETERINARY SERVICE

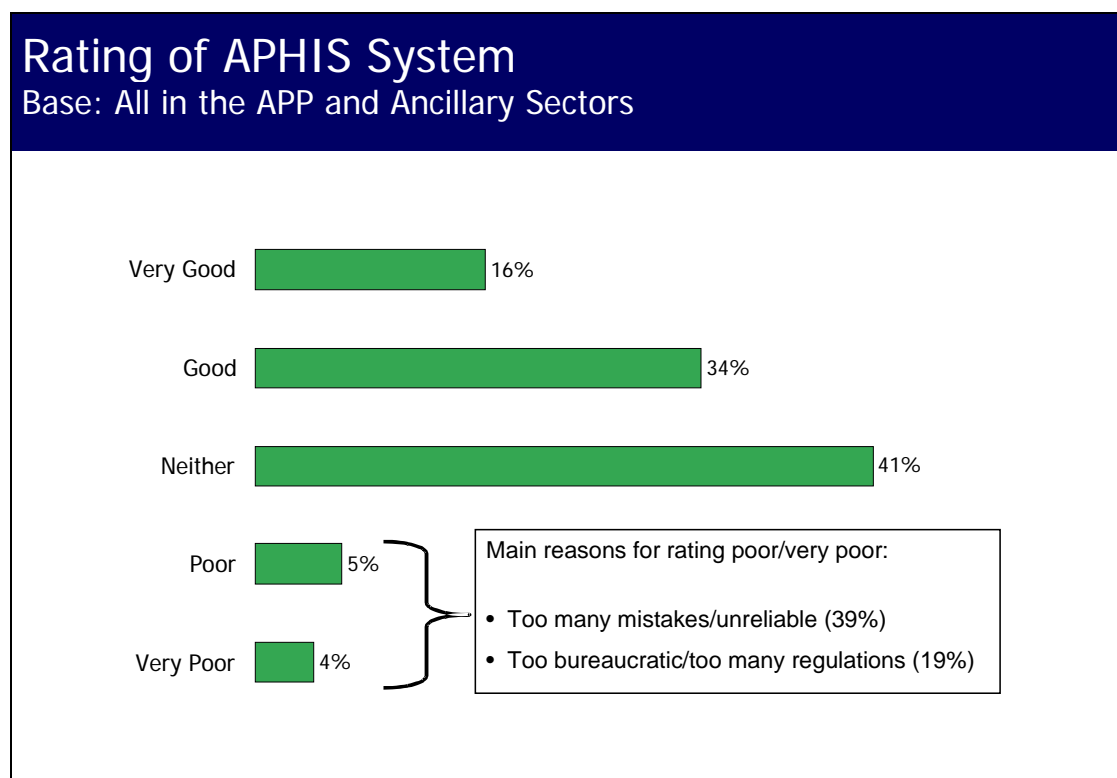
Over half (55%) of customers in the APP and Ancillary sectors have had contact with the Veterinary Service in the last three years. The main purpose has been for TB/Brucellosis inspections or testing, with 60% dealing with the Veterinary Service on this issue. 18% have been in contact regarding the identification or registration of animals, while 10% each have had dealings for the movement of animals, and on animal welfare issues.



8.3.7.2 ANIMAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEM (APHIS)

APHIS is an information database that provides an auditable traceability system to track cattle health status and cattle movements. Customers can use the system to register animal births and deaths, download their herdlist and apply for approval to order eartags.

Customers from the APP and ancillary sectors were also asked to rate DARD's APHIS system. 16% rate the system as 'very good' and a further 34% as 'good'. 9% rate it as 'poor' or 'very poor'. Significantly, a sizeable proportion (41%) had no strong feelings either way, this rising to 61% among those in the Ancillary Sector. Of those who rated it as "poor" the main reasons are that there are too many mistakes & it is unreliable (mentioned by 39% of those who rated it poor), and it is too bureaucratic and has too many regulations (mentioned by 19%).



8.3.7.3 IMPORT AND EXPORT OF LIVE ANIMALS

Just 2% of all customers in the APP and Ancillary sectors who have had dealings with the Veterinary Service indicated that they had imported or exported live animals in the last three years. The base numbers are therefore very low, so it is difficult to report meaningfully. However, as some indication, most of the import and export of animals was done both overland and through a port. DARD's service was rated fairly well in this respect, with just one person rating it as poor. Most were also satisfied with the performance of the Portal Branch, with again just one person rating it as poor. The preferences would be for the Veterinary Service to communicate the import and export requirements and procedures for live animals by post or fax.

8.3.7.4 PRIVATE VETERINARY PRACTITIONER (PVP) AND AUTHORISED VETERINARY INSPECTOR (AVI) RELATED ISSUES

23% of all those in the Ancillary sector (38 customers) are PVPs, AVIs, or both. Of these, 61% are both, 24% are PVPs only, and 16% are AVIs only. These are fairly small base numbers so care should be taken in the interpretation of these results.

Provision of education and training

Just 24% of PVPs and/or AVIs rate DARD's use of PVPs in this aspect as good, with 37% rating it as poor.

Provision of instructions and guidance

On this issue, 39% rate DARD's activity as good, while 24% rate it as poor.

Tuberculosis testing arrangements/contact

53% of customers rate DARD's use of PVPs in relation to this issue as good, with just 5% stating it is poor.

Related Issues

In terms of additional tasks PVPs should perform on behalf of the Veterinary Service, the most common mentions were brucellosis testing and, to a lesser extent, blood tests.

In relation to helping customers cope with a future outbreak of exotic animal disease, it is felt that DARD's Veterinary Service could communicate better, keep customers better informed and provide them with more information in advance, and also provide better training and education.

AVIs Only

All those AVIs (total number of 29 overall) were asked how they rate the advice and documentation provided by DARD's Veterinary Service relating to the export of livestock and export of cats and dogs. Again these are low base numbers so care should be taken in the interpretation of the results below.

Export of Livestock

28% rate advice provided regarding the export of livestock as good, while 31% rate it as poor. In terms of documentation provided in relation to the export of livestock, 24% feel it was poor, 14% that it is good, while over half (52%) believe it is neither good nor poor.

Export of Cats and Dogs

38% rate advice relating to the export of cats and dogs as good and 24% as poor. 28% feel that documentation relating to the export of cats and dogs is good, and 21% poor.

8.3.7.5 MEAT PLANT OPERATORS

Meat plant operators (n=42) were asked to rate the delivery of services at their premises by Veterinary staff. Almost two thirds (64%) rate the delivery of services as good, with just 2% rating it as poor.

In terms of further steps the Veterinary Service could take to help their business, the majority did not think there was anything more that could be done. The most common suggestions were for them to have greater commercial and practical focus, and for there to be greater accessibility and clearer lines of communication, although these were mentioned by a low number of customers.

8.3.8 FISHERIES

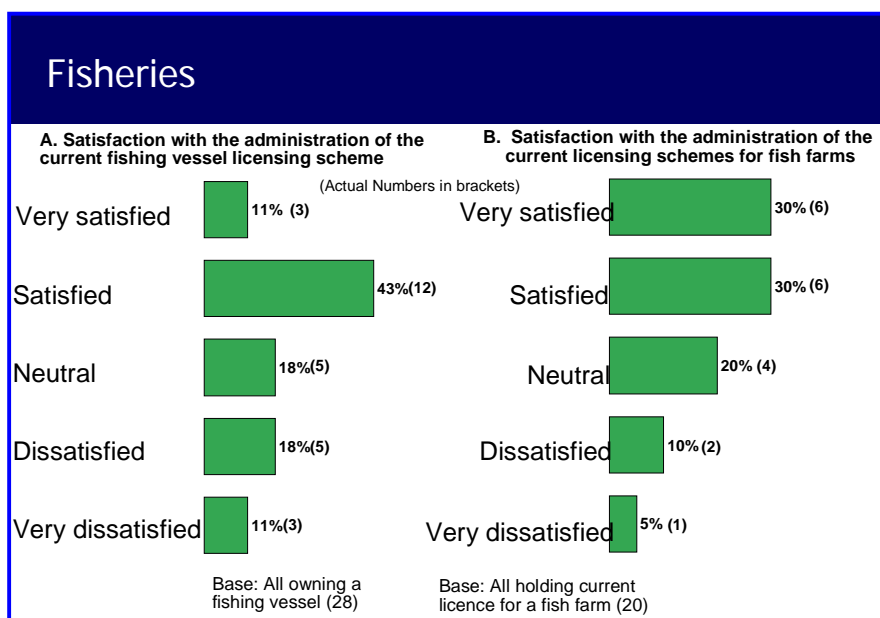
87% of those in the Fisheries sector indicated that they have had contact with DARD Fisheries Division in relation to a sea fishing issue, fish or shellfish farming matters, or for both.

8.3.8.1 FISHING VESSEL LICENSING SCHEME

Customers who have contacted DARD for sea fishing issues were asked if they owned a fishing vessel (93% indicated they did) and if so, how satisfied they are with the administration of the current fishing vessel licensing scheme. While bearing in mind that based numbers are low (n=28) and care should be taken in interpreting the figures, over half are satisfied with this process (43% "satisfied", 11% "very satisfied"), while almost three in ten are dissatisfied (18% "dissatisfied", 11% "very dissatisfied").

8.3.8.2 FISH FARMING

Customers who have contacted DARD for fish or shellfish farming matters, were asked if they hold a current licence for a fish farm. 87% stated that they did and of these, 60% are satisfied with the process (30% "satisfied", 30% "very satisfied"), and 15% are dissatisfied (10% "dissatisfied", 5% "very dissatisfied"). Again these are low base numbers (n=20) so care should be taken in the interpretation of the figures. 65% of such customers have received advice from DARD Fisheries Division on fish farming in the past three years in relation to fish health matters and/or other fish farming issues. The quality of advice received on these matters was rated as good or very good by 82% (35% "good" and 47% "very good").



8.3.9 CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM – SUMMARY

12% of customers have made a complaint against DARD in the last three years, while a further 12% have felt they should have made a complaint but have not. Most complaints were with the Veterinary Service or with regard to funding. There is a high level of dissatisfaction with the handling of complaints. Some of the reasons for dissatisfaction are outside of DARD's control (e.g. refusal of grant), but others should be addressed (e.g. how well a complaint is handled, or how well an explanation about a decision is communicated).

9% of customers have made an appeal against a decision made by DARD in the last three years. The main appeals were in relation to funding and most were again dissatisfied with how the appeal was handled.

Four in five customers have received funding from DARD in the last three years. Environment-related funding rated highly in terms of administration, application forms, helpfulness of staff involved, and timeliness of payments. Crops and Livestock funding and Rural Development funding rate less highly, especially in relation to application forms (Rural Development funding) and timeliness of payments (Crops and Livestock funding).

Over a third of customers have attended education or training courses provided by DARD in the last three years. Most common were business management/IT courses or livestock-related courses and most found them useful to their work, although some felt there was scope for greater communication of courses.

Advice, technology transfer, research, diagnostic and analytical services were used more by those in the ancillary/processing sector. CAFRE's Loughry Campus, Veterinary Services Division, Veterinary Investigation Centre, and CAFRE's Greenmount Campus were the most commonly used. Service provided by such centres was rated highly across the board.

Just over one in ten customers have received Rural Development Funding. Half rated the Rural Development programme as good, but almost one in five felt it was poor, the main reasons being the application process and payment-related issues.

Less than a third of customers were aware of Rural Connect, and only 5% had actually used the service.

Awareness of agri-environment schemes was much higher (88%) and almost a quarter were currently participating in (or had participated in) such schemes. The majority of those on both the Countryside Management Scheme and Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme rated them as good.

Over half of customers in the APP and Ancillary/Processing sectors have had contact with the Veterinary Service in the last three years, the main reasons being for TB/Brucellosis Testing/Inspection. Almost half of these customers rated the APHIS system as good. One in ten rated it as poor, the main reason being that there are too many mistakes and it is somewhat unreliable.

Almost nine in ten customers in the Fisheries sector had dealt with DARD. Of those vessel owners, over half were satisfied and almost three in ten were dissatisfied with the current fishing vessel licensing scheme. Three in five fish farmers were satisfied with the licensing process for fish farms. Almost two thirds of those in the Fisheries sector have received advice from DARD Fisheries Division, and 82% rated this advice as good.

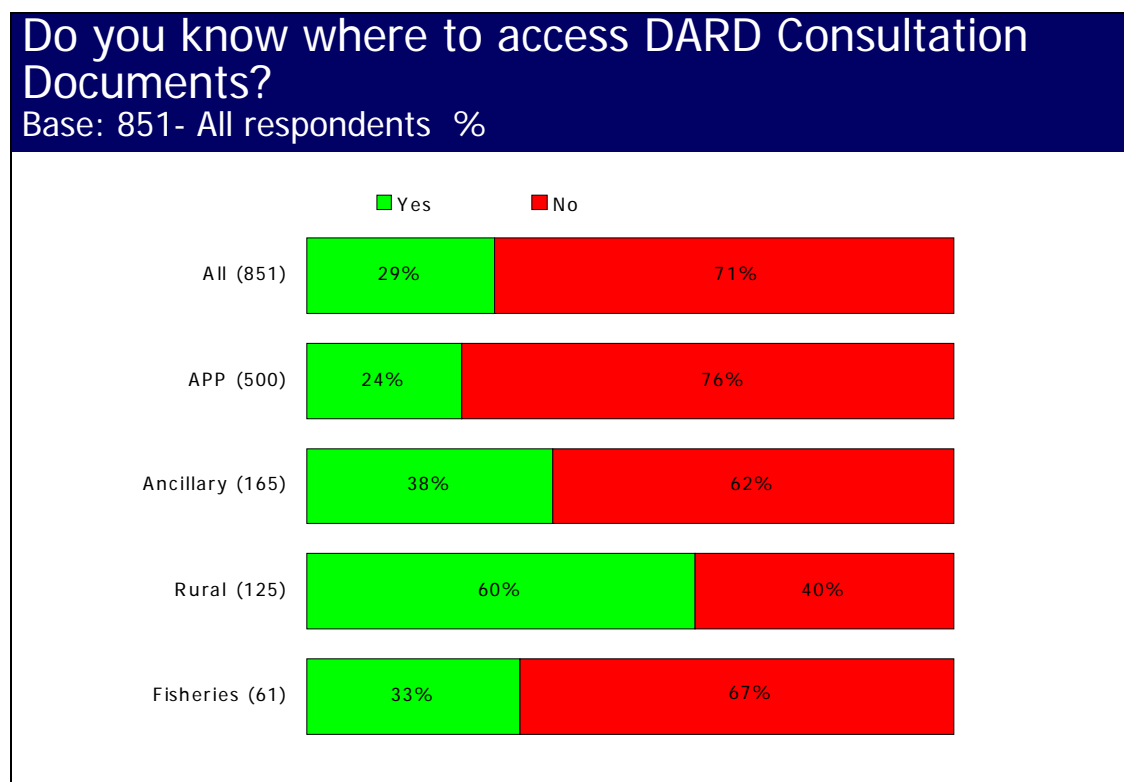
8.4 POLICY ISSUES AND ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS

- Policy Issues
- Economics and Statistics

8.4.1 POLICY ISSUES

8.4.1.1 ACCESS TO CONSULTATION DOCUMENTS

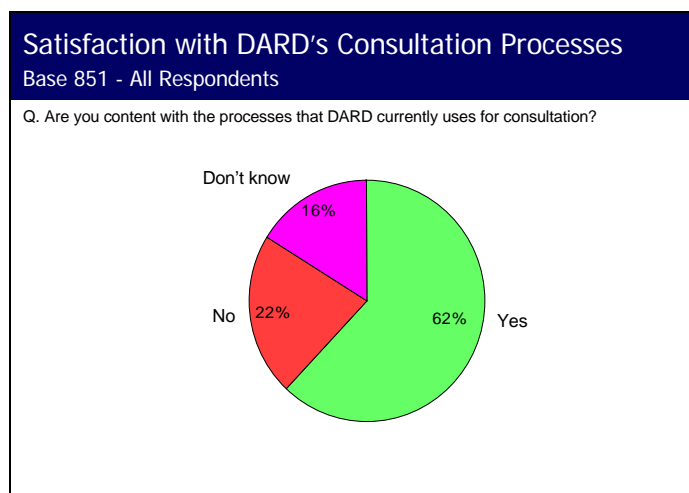
29% of all customers know where to access DARD consultation documents. This falls slightly to 24% among those in the APP sector, but rises significantly to 38% among those in the Ancillary sector and to 60% in the “Rural Communities” sector.



The main source customers would use to access DARD consultation documents is via the Website, with almost half (47%) indicating they would use this method (rising to 61% among those in the ancillary sector and 79% with those in the “rural” sector).

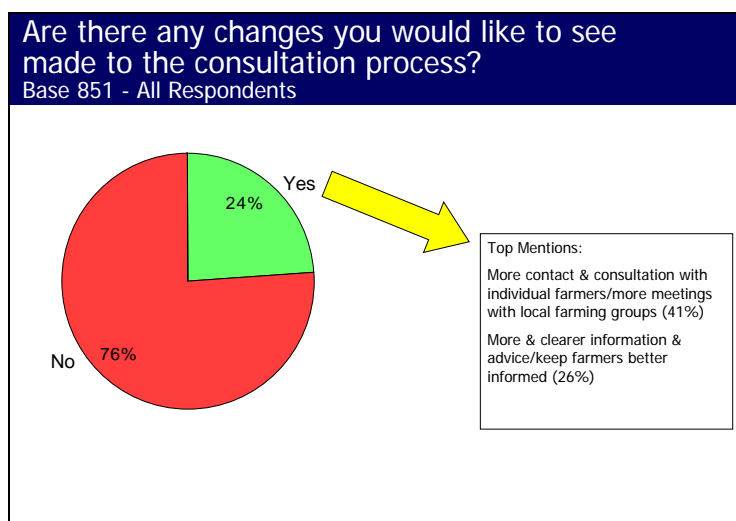
8.4.1.2 SATISFACTION WITH THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Almost two thirds of all customers indicated they are content with the processes that DARD currently use for consultation. Over one in five customers are not content and this presents a challenge to DARD.



8.4.1.3 CHANGES TO THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

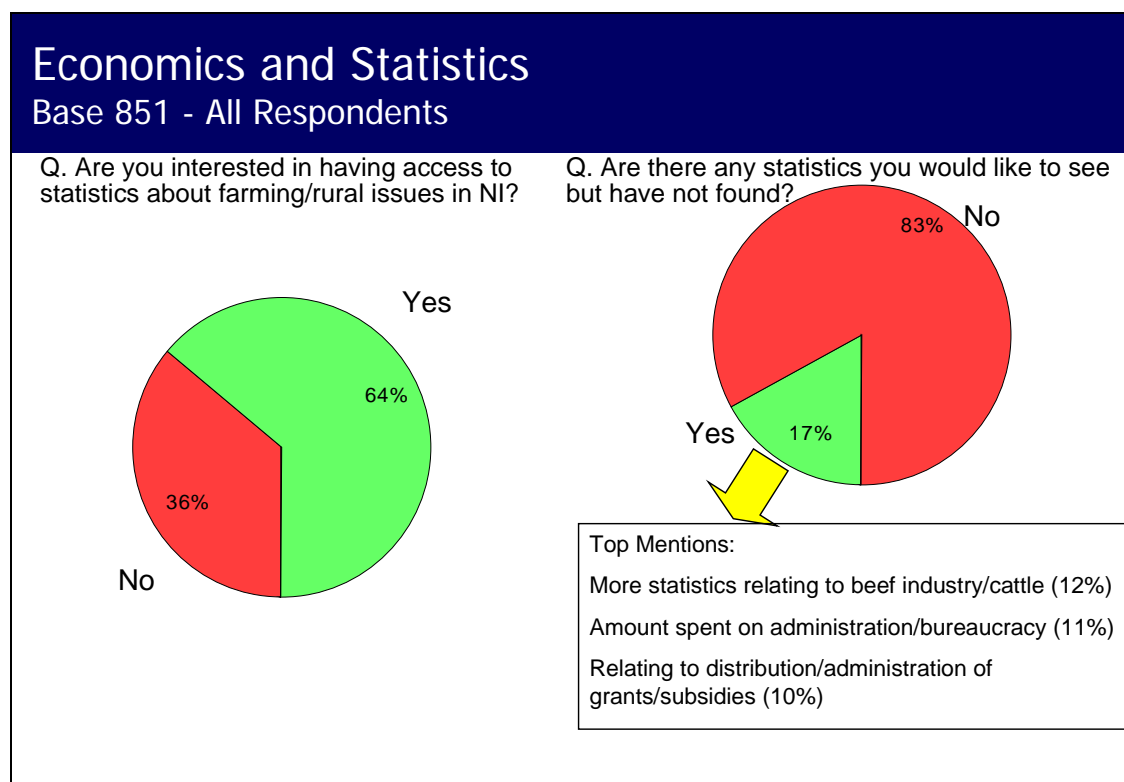
Almost one quarter of all customers (24%), rising to 39% among those in the "Rural Communities" sector, would like to see changes made to the consultation process. 41% of those who have suggested changes indicated that they want there to be greater contact/consultation with individual farmers, more meetings with local farming groups, and greater farming community involvement. Another common suggestion (mentioned by 26% of those who wanted to see changes to the consultation process) is for clearer information and advice to be provided by DARD, so that customers are generally better informed as to what is going on. 14% would like to see the consultation process simplified and made less bureaucratic with less red tape.



8.4.2 ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS

8.4.2.1 ACCESS TO STATISTICS

Almost two thirds (64%) of customers indicated that they would be interested in having access to statistics about farming and rural issues (and fisheries where appropriate) in Northern Ireland, rising to 79% among those in the “Rural Communities” sector.



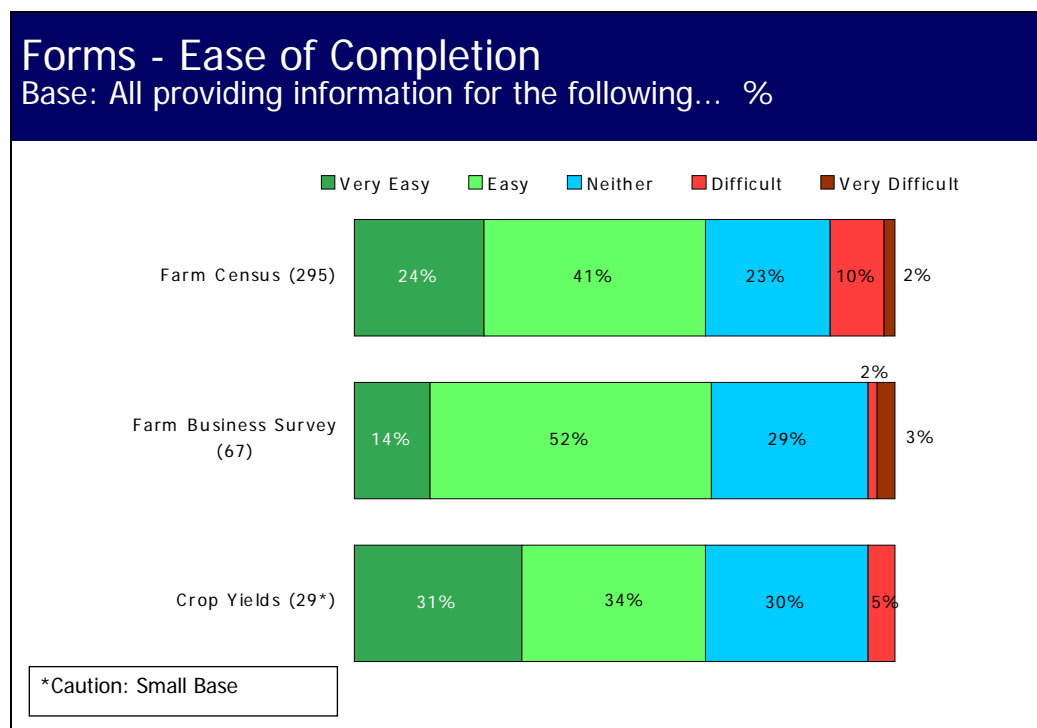
17% indicated that there are statistics they would like to see but have not found. Of these, 12% want to see more statistics relating to the beef industry/cattle, 11% to the amount spent on admin and bureaucracy, and 10% on statistics relating to the distribution/administration of grants/subsidies.

8.4.2.2 PROVISION OF STATISTICAL INFORMATION AND RELATED ISSUES

APP customers were asked if they provide statistical information to the Department. Over two-thirds (68%) state that they do, and of these 88% provide statistical information for the Farm Census, with 18% for the Farm Business Survey, and 8% for crop yields.

Forms – Ease of Completion

Customers who have provided information were asked how easy or difficult the forms are to fill in. The results are presented in the following chart and discussed below:



Farm Census

Of those who have provided information for the Farm Census, almost two thirds feel the forms are “easy” or “very easy” to complete, while 12% believe that they are “difficult” or “very difficult” to complete. Of those who find them difficult the main suggestion for improvement is for there to be less detail and for them to be made easier to understand.

Farm Business Survey

Two thirds (66%) of those in the APP sector feel the forms for the Farm Business Survey are easy to fill in (comprising 14% of those who believe they are “very easy” to fill in and 52% who state they are “easy” to complete). Just 5% believe they are difficult to fill in.

Crop Yields

For forms relating to crop yields, 31% feel these are “very easy” to complete, with a further 34% indicating they are “easy” to fill in. Just 5% find the forms difficult to complete.

8.4.3 POLICY ISSUES AND ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS – SUMMARY

Over a quarter of customers know where to access DARD consultation documents.

Almost two-thirds of customers are happy with the current processes that DARD use for consultation, although there is less satisfaction among those in the Rural Communities sector. Almost a quarter would like to see changes made to the consultation process, the top mentions being greater contact, consultation and communication from DARD with individual farmers and local farmers groups.

Almost two-thirds of customers are interested in having access to statistics about farming and rural issues in Northern Ireland. Of those who provide statistical information to the Department most find the forms easy to complete.

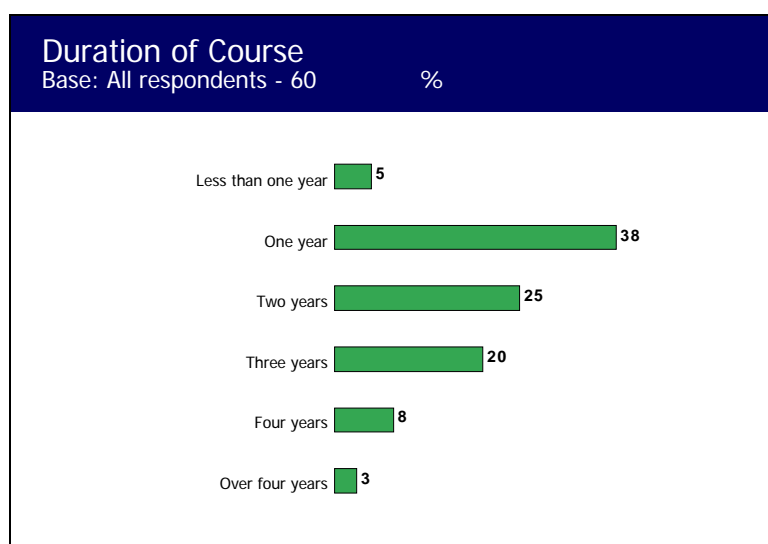
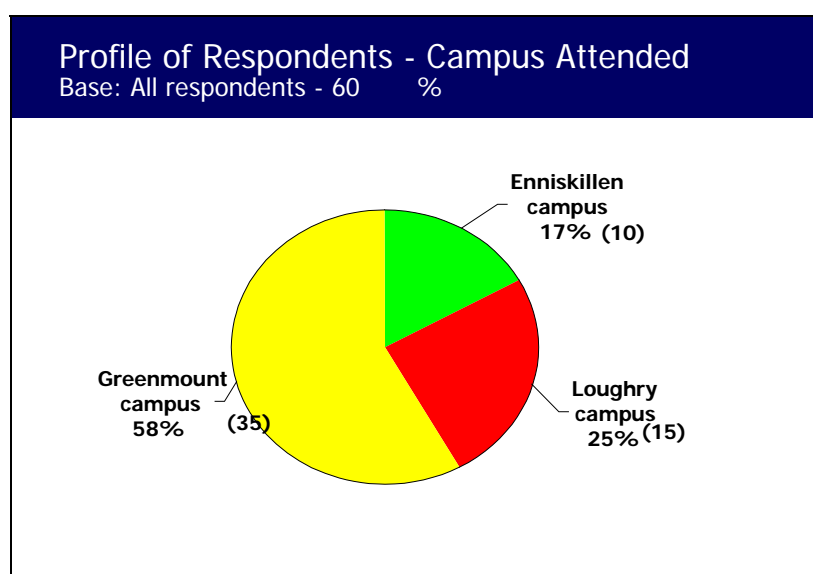
9. Survey of Students

In order to ascertain the views of students, a separate survey was conducted among those attending the CAFRE's three campuses, namely Greenmount, Loughry, and Enniskillen.

60 Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews were carried out with students from Greenmount (35 students), Loughry (15) and Enniskillen (10). Fieldwork dates were 24th – 25th November 2003.

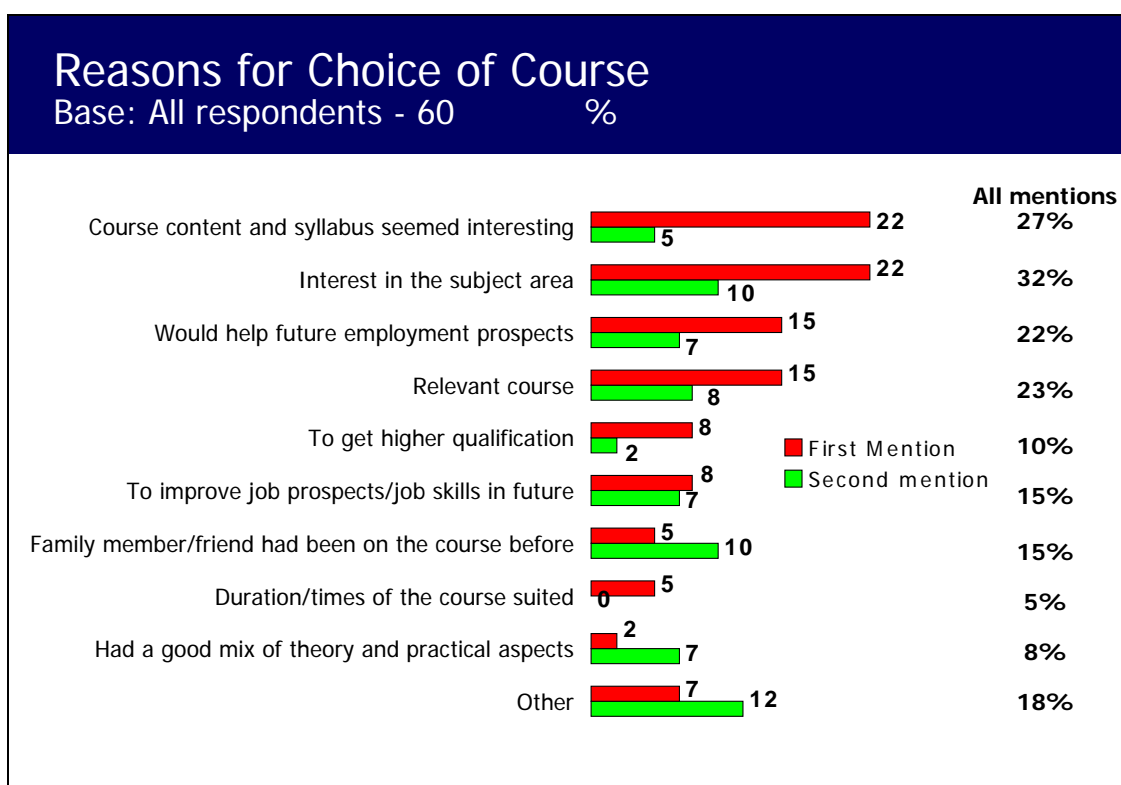
The main findings from the survey of students are presented below.

9.1 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS: CAMPUS ATTENDED/DURATION OF COURSE



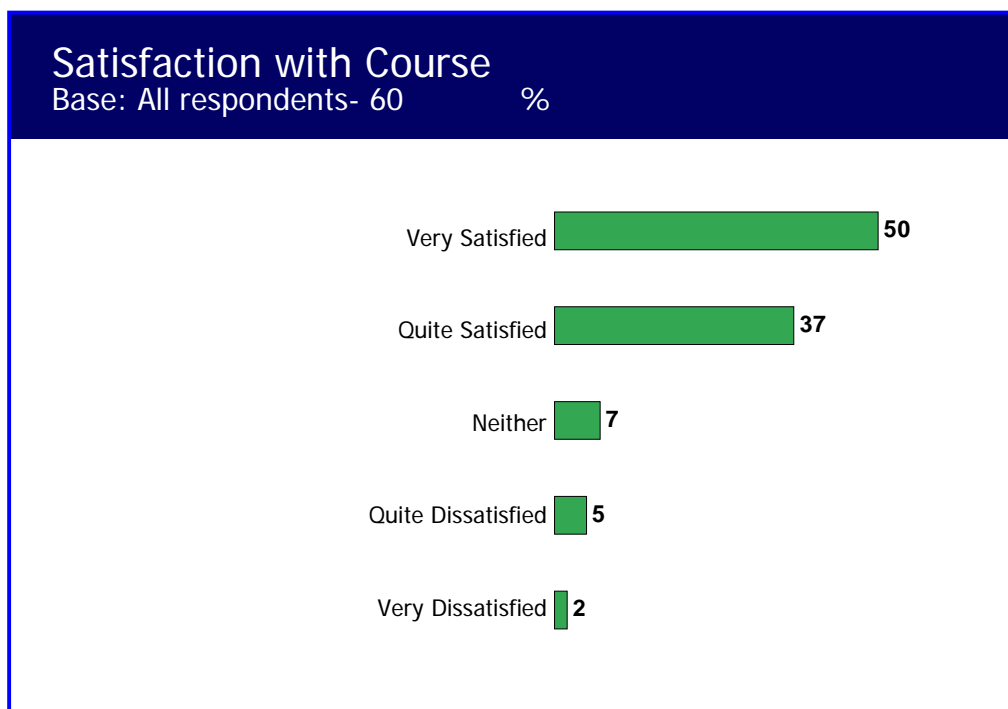
9.2 FINDING OUT ABOUT COURSES- REASONS FOR CHOICE

Respondents were asked how they found about the course they were doing. 35% found out from the careers teacher or as a result of careers advice. The next most likely ways of finding out were from past experience (18% mentioned this) or word of mouth (17%). The main reasons for this particular course for 22% of the respondents respectively was course content (syllabus seemed interesting) or interest in the subject area. A full list of responses are outlined below:



9.3 OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH COURSE

87% of the students interviewed were satisfied with the course (made up of 50% very satisfied and 37% quite satisfied).

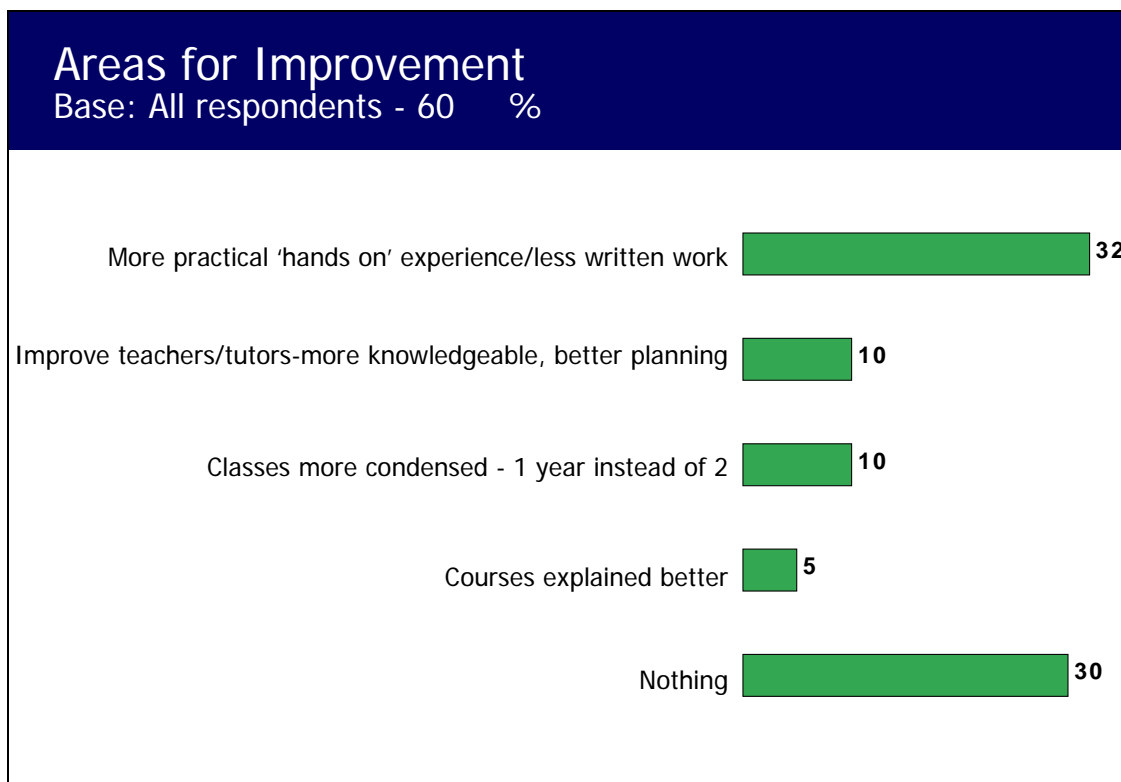


Students were most impressed with the following aspects:

- Hands on/practical experience/Work placement, which was mentioned by 45%
- Relevant topics covered/relevant course content (32%)
- Quality of teaching/lecturers (23%)
- Helpfulness of teachers/lecturers (20%)

9.4 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Just under a third of the respondents felt there should be more practical 'hands on' experience and less written work.



9.5 WORK PLACEMENT/EXPERIENCE

Over half the respondents had a work placement or work experience on the course (37 respondents of which 23 were students from Greenmount). The majority (92%, 34) of these respondents felt that the placement or experience was useful. The main reasons cited were 'hands on/relevant experience' (mentioned by 19 respondents) and learning new methods of application and doing things (14 respondents). Nine respondents felt it broadens knowledge of the industry, 8 felt it prepares you for the work place, and 7 felt it builds up skills such as social skills.

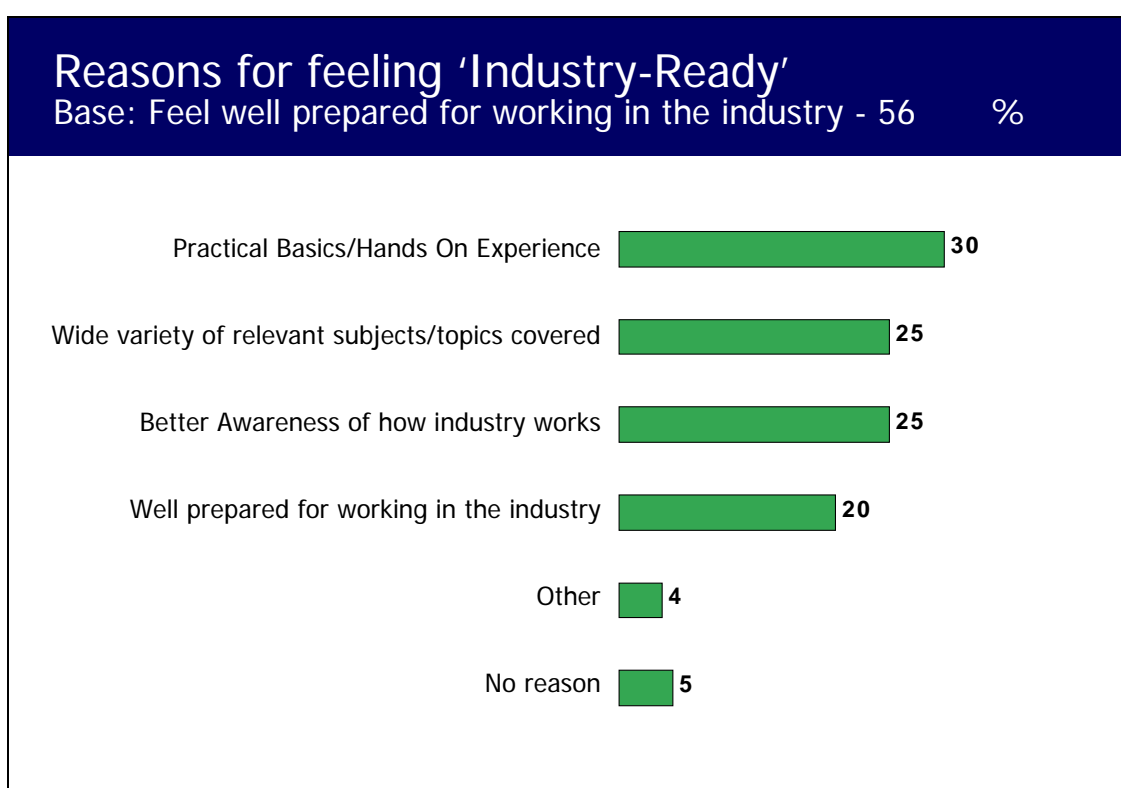
9.6 ONLINE TEACHING/LEARNING ELEMENT

Over half the respondents (55%, 33 respondents) stated that their course had an online teaching or learning element.

Almost two-thirds of students (62%) would like to see greater emphasis placed on online teaching or learning in courses.

9.7 INDUSTRY-READY?

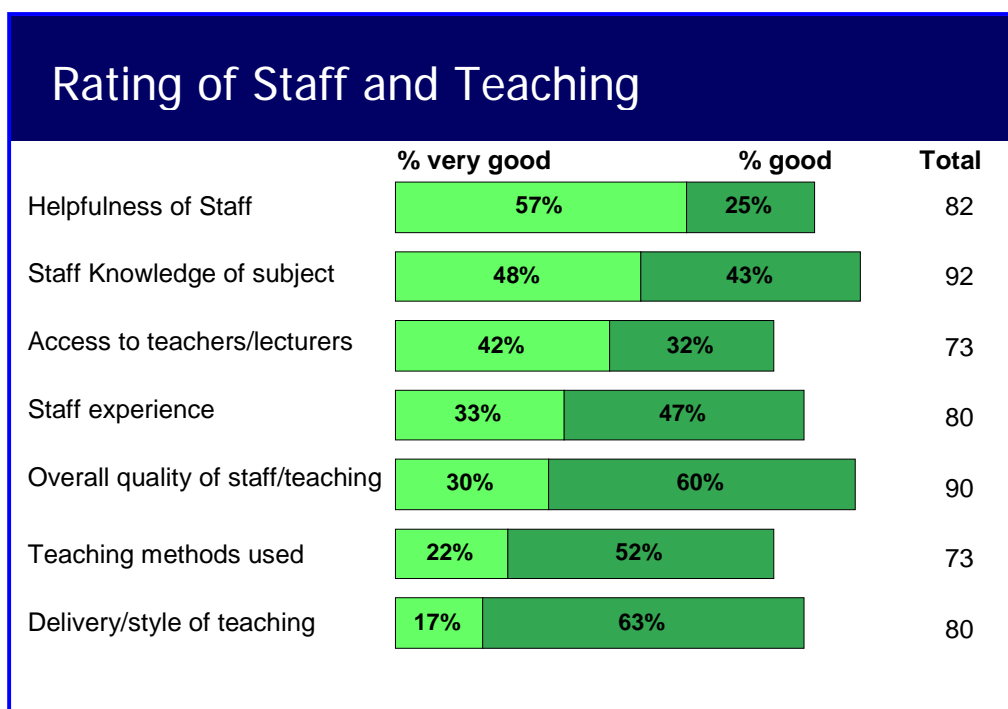
Almost all, 93% (56) of the respondents felt that the course has prepared them well for working in the industry. The chart below lists the main reasons behind this:



Only two respondents felt they were neither well nor poorly prepared for working in the industry mainly because of the wide variety of relevant subjects or topics covered and they would like more hands on or practical experience. A further two respondents felt that they did not feel well prepared for working in the industry due to not having enough experience personally and the fact that there was too much theory or not enough practical experience.

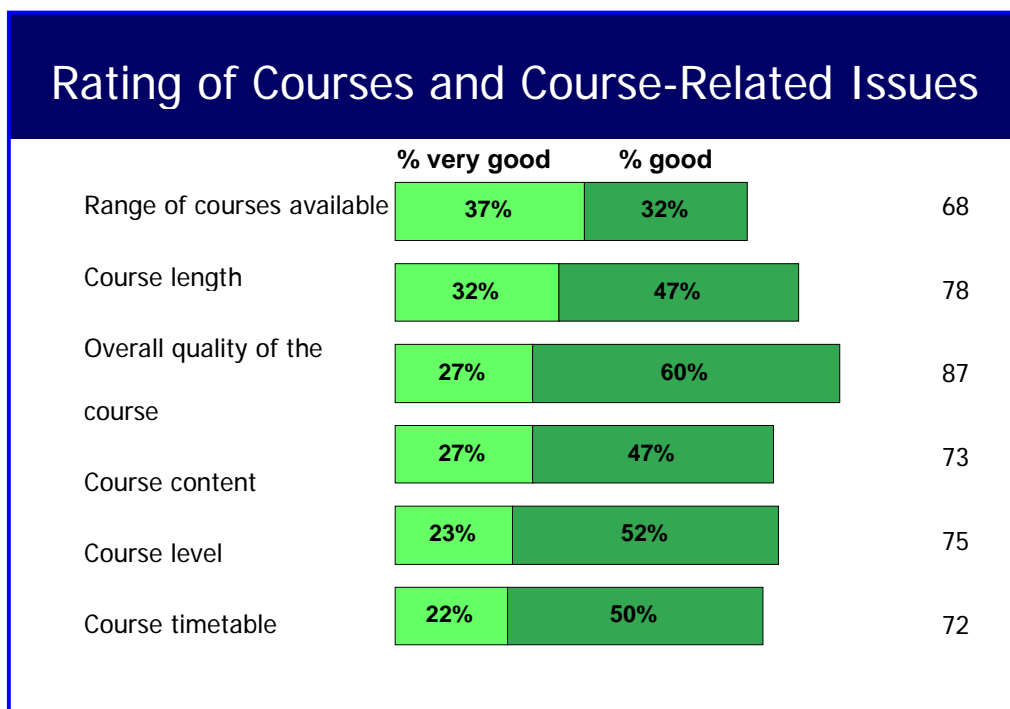
9.8 RATING OF STAFF AND TEACHING ISSUES

92% of students rated staff knowledge of the subject as good, while 90% rated the overall quality of staff or teaching good. 57% rated the staff as very helpful. The full range of responses is shown in the chart below:



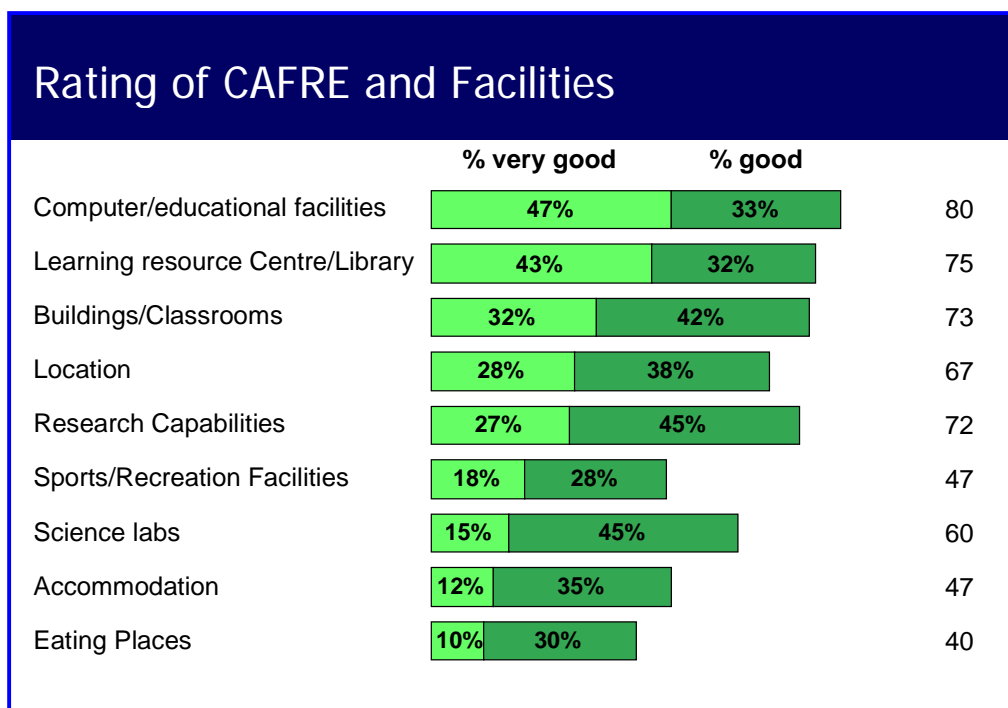
9.9 RATING OF COURSES AND COURSE-RELATED ISSUES

The overall quality of the course was well rated at 87% college (made up of 27% very satisfied and 60% quite satisfied). The full range of responses for each aspect is shown in the chart below:



9.10 RATING OF CAFRE AND FACILITIES - OVERALL

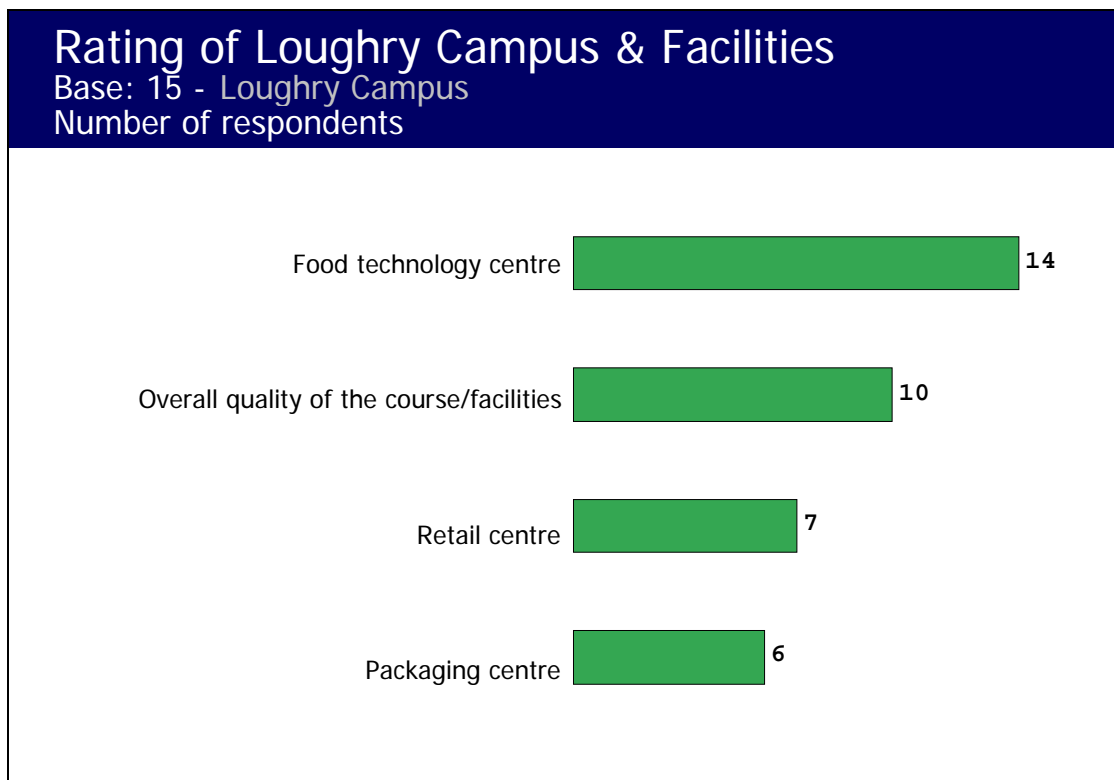
80% of the students interviewed were satisfied with the computer and educational facilities. There were much lower levels of satisfaction with eating places, accommodation, and sports/recreational facilities.



On the next few pages are the ratings for each additional aspect of each campus's facilities.

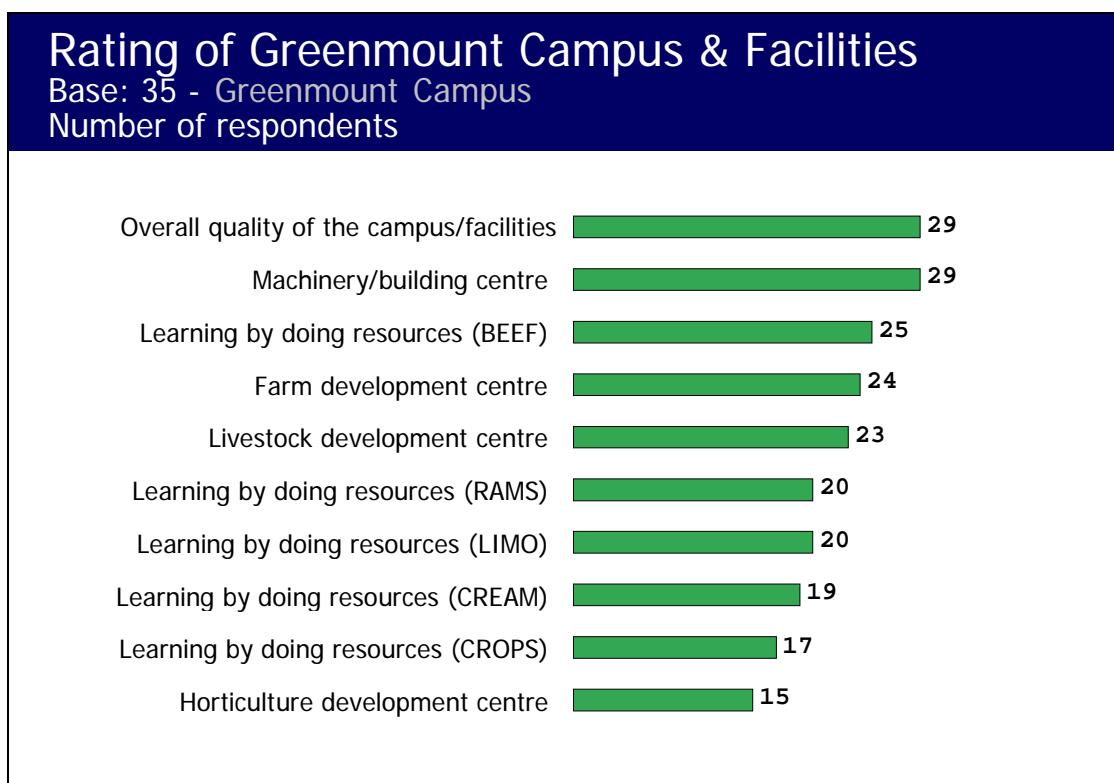
9.10.1 RATING OF THE CAMPUS AND ITS FACILITIES – LOUGHRY CAMPUS

Most (14 out of 15) the students interviewed were satisfied with the Food Technology Centre.



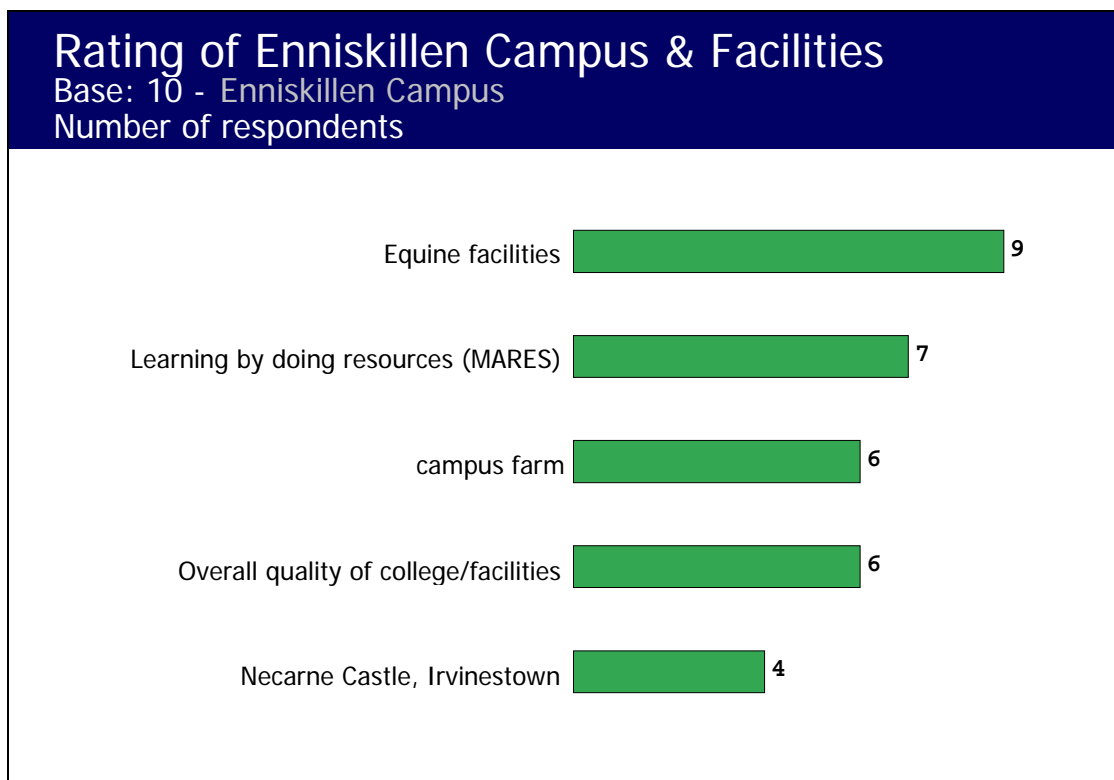
9.10.2 RATING OF THE CAMPUS AND ITS FACILITIES – GREENMOUNT CAMPUS

Overall 29 of the 35 students interviewed were satisfied with the overall quality of the college and facilities, as well as the machinery and building centre.



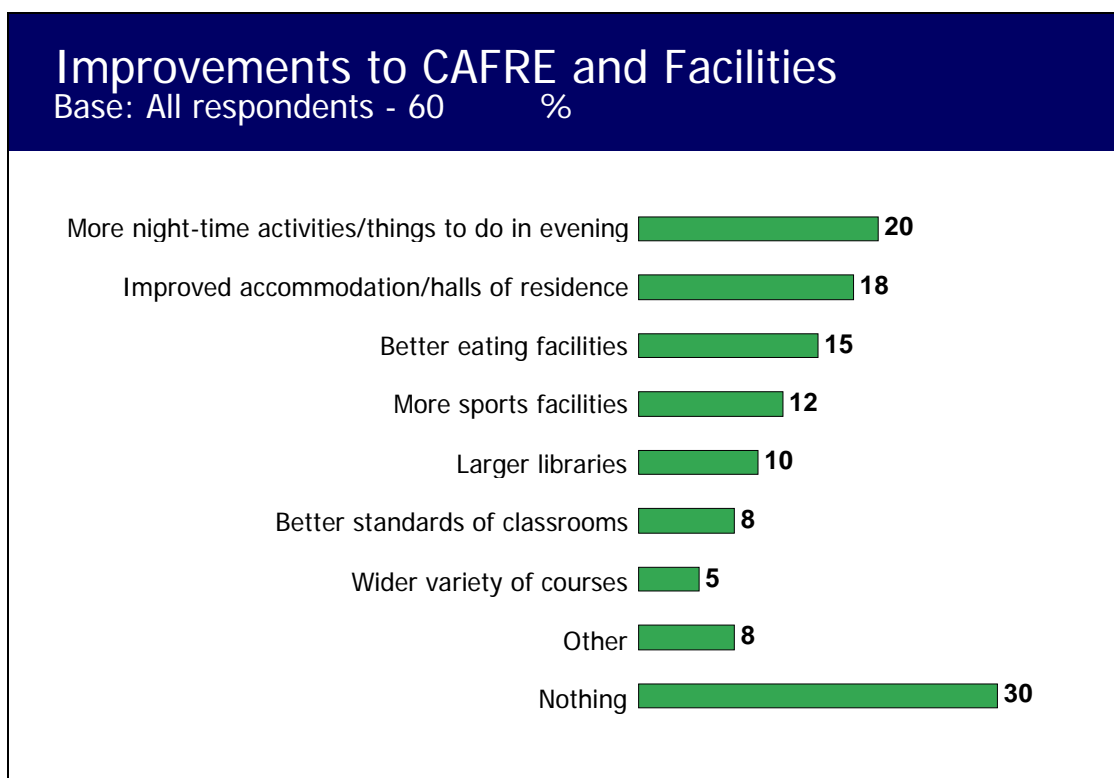
9.10.3 RATING OF THE CAMPUS AND ITS FACILITIES – ENNISKILLEN CAMPUS

Students were most satisfied with the Equine facilities with 9 of the 10 students reporting that they were good.



9.11 IMPROVEMENTS TO CAFRE AND FACILITIES

Almost a third (30%) of the students thought that there was nothing that needed to be improved in terms of CAFRE and its facilities. Of those that did feel improvements were necessary, 20 felt that there should be more night-time events or things to do in the evening, 18% felt the accommodation or halls of residence could be improved and 15% stated that there could be better eating facilities.



9.12 SUMMARY

Overall, 87% of students were satisfied with CAFRE, with 50% very satisfied and 37% quite satisfied. 87% of students were also satisfied with the overall quality of the course they undertook, but only one quarter (27%) rated it as very good.

The main area considered to be needing improvement was “more practical hands on experience and less written work” mentioned by 32% of students.

Two thirds of students would like to see greater emphasis on online teaching and learning in courses.

93% felt that the course had prepared them well for working in the industry.

10. Survey of Forest Service Customers

This part of the survey focussed on the experiences of customers of DARD's Forest Service along a range of issues. There were 75 interviews in total, comprising:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| ▪ Other recreational users | 34 interviews |
| ▪ Caravanners | 21 |
| ▪ Grant recipients | 18 |
| ▪ Sawmills/Timber Merchants | 2 |

The main findings from the survey of Forest Service customers are provided below:

10.1 ALL FOREST SERVICE CUSTOMERS – KEY FINDINGS

Of those who have dealt with DARD's Forest Service in the last 3 years:

- 52% have been "very satisfied" and 40% "satisfied" with the service provided by the Forest Service. Just 2% were dissatisfied. So, overall satisfaction levels are very high.
- The main forms of contact are by telephone (43%) and face-to-face (33%).
- Of those who deal with the Forest Service on a face-to-face basis, 38% visited a local office. Visiting is infrequent (three quarters visit once or twice a year or less), but the service received is good. The main reasons for visiting a local office are to obtain/renew a permit, to obtain permission to hold events, and to obtain general information.
- 69% of those in the Forestry Service sector have a PC at home. Of these, 85% use it to access the Internet. Of those who have accessed the Internet: 28% have accessed the Forest Service Website; 33% have accessed the main DARD Website; 20% have accessed Rural NI (Rural Portal) Website; 13% have accessed the Rural Development Programme Website; and 9% have accessed the Fisheries Website. 35% state they would like to do more business with DARD via computer in the future.
- Just 5% have made a complaint against DARD in the last three years.
- Only 4% have attended courses run by DARD or the Forest Service in the past three years.
- 39% are content with the processes that DARD currently use for consultation. 9% are not content and 52% did not know or are not in a position to comment.

- Almost half of Forest Service customers (44%) are interested in having access to statistics about forestry or rural issues in Northern Ireland.

10.2 RECREATIONAL USERS – KEY FINDINGS

- Among recreational users who visit forest parks, 62% do so for walking, 35% for caravanning, and 18% for camping.
- 80% of recreational users have had contact with Forest Service staff at forest parks in the last three years. Satisfaction levels are high, with 75% very satisfied with the service received, 16% satisfied, and just 9% dissatisfied.
- 87% of all recreational users receive permits from the Forest Service, of these 42% received activity permits and 40% received caravanning or Touring in the Trees permits. For those receiving activity permits 45% rated the applications process as very good and 30% as good. 5% rated it as poor. For those receiving caravanning or Touring in the Trees permits, 74% rated the applications process as very good and 16% as good. 5% rated it as poor.
- 35% said they would be very likely to make their permit application online if the service was available, while 13% stated they would be likely to. 35% stated they would be very unlikely to apply online and 13% that they would be unlikely.

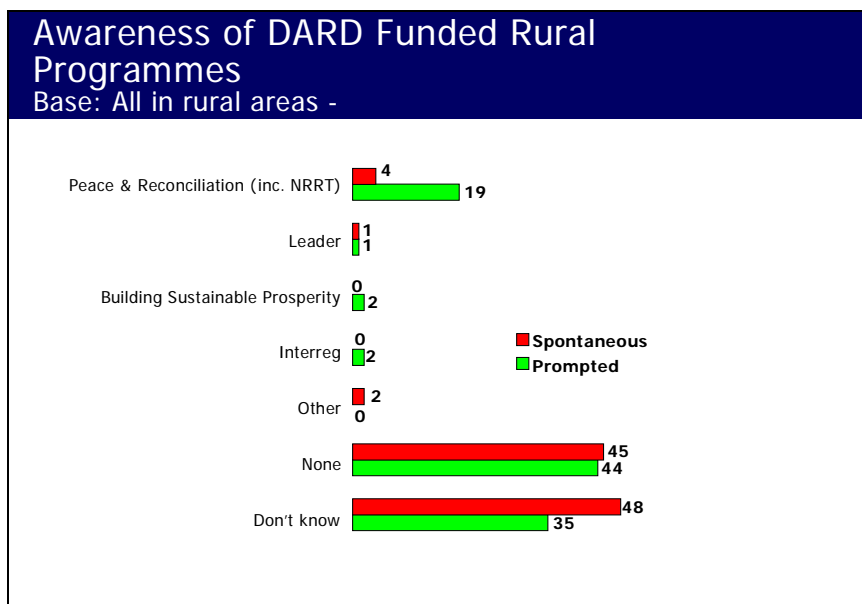
11. Survey of General Public (Omnibus)

DARD wished to gather the views of the general public in rural areas on a number of pertinent issues. 1023 interviews were conducted on a face to face basis with a representative sample of the general public in Northern Ireland. Of these, approximately one-third (307) were conducted with those residing in “rural” areas. For the purposes of this research, “rural” is defined as areas with less than one person per hectare. Issues relating to Rural Development Programmes were asked of those in rural areas only, questions on forestry and forest parks visiting were asked to all respondents. Fieldwork dates for the Omnibus survey were from 21st November – 11th December 2003. The key findings from this general public survey are presented below.

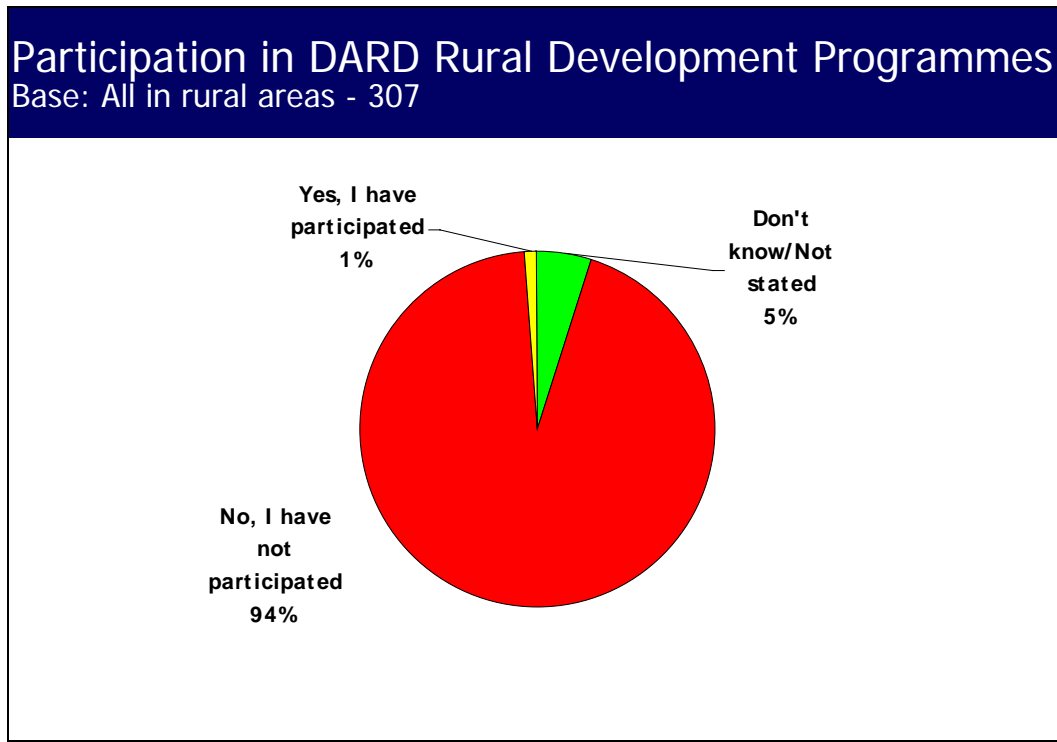
11.1 RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES (asked of respondents in rural areas only)

Awareness of rural organisations that provide monies through schemes for individuals or rural communities (among those living in rural areas) was very limited. Over six in ten (61%) of those interviewed did not name a rural organisation. A further third stated ‘don’t know’. Of the 16 respondents who mentioned an organisation, responses included National Lottery funding, the Rural Development Council, Heritage Fund and Cross Community/Community Development Groups.

Awareness of DARD funded Rural Development Programmes was also limited. When spontaneously asked, the majority (93%) of respondents stated ‘none’ (45%) or ‘don’t know’ (48%). When prompted, this figure reduced to 79% (44% none, 35% don’t know). At an overall level (all mentions) the Peace & Reconciliation programme (inc. Natural Resource Rural Tourism) was mentioned by just over one in five (21%).



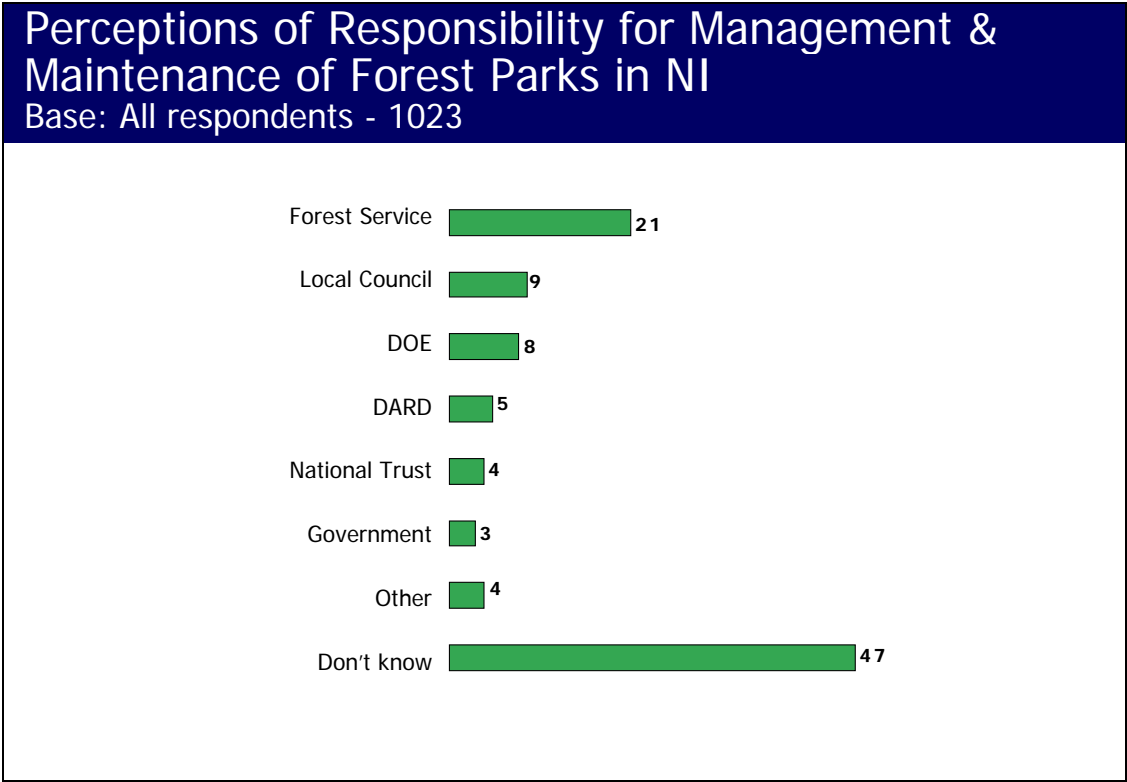
94% of respondents living in rural areas had not participated in any of the DARD Rural Development Programmes.



Of the three respondents who had participated in DARD Rural Development Programmes, two had participated in the Peace & Reconciliation programme (inc. Natural Resource Rural Tourism), one in Leader, one in Building Sustainable Prosperity, and one in Interreg. One respondent stated the programme was of no benefit to them.

11.2 FORESTRY-RELATED ISSUES (asked of all respondents)

Approximately one in five (21%) of all respondents felt the Forest Service is responsible for the management and maintenance of forest parks in Northern Ireland. Further mentions were local councils (9%) and the Department of the Environment (8%).

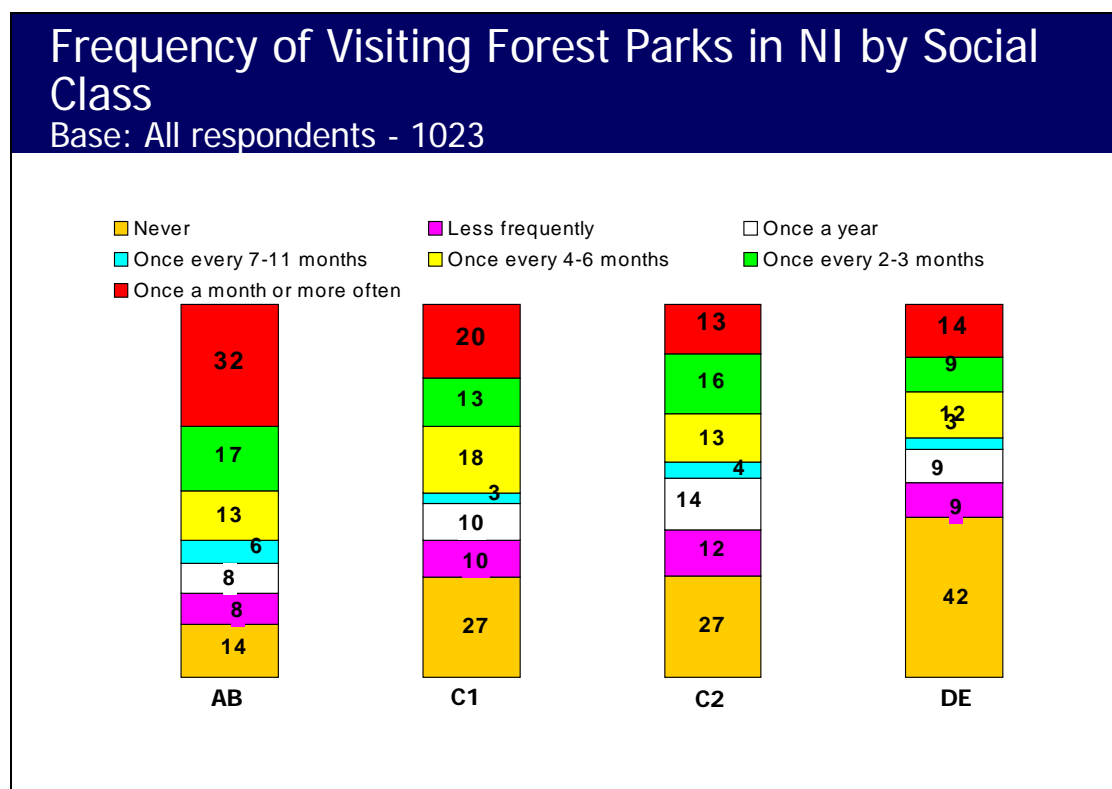


11.3 FOREST PARK VISITING

In terms of frequency of visiting forest parks, 17% stated they would visit a Forest Park on average once a month or more often.



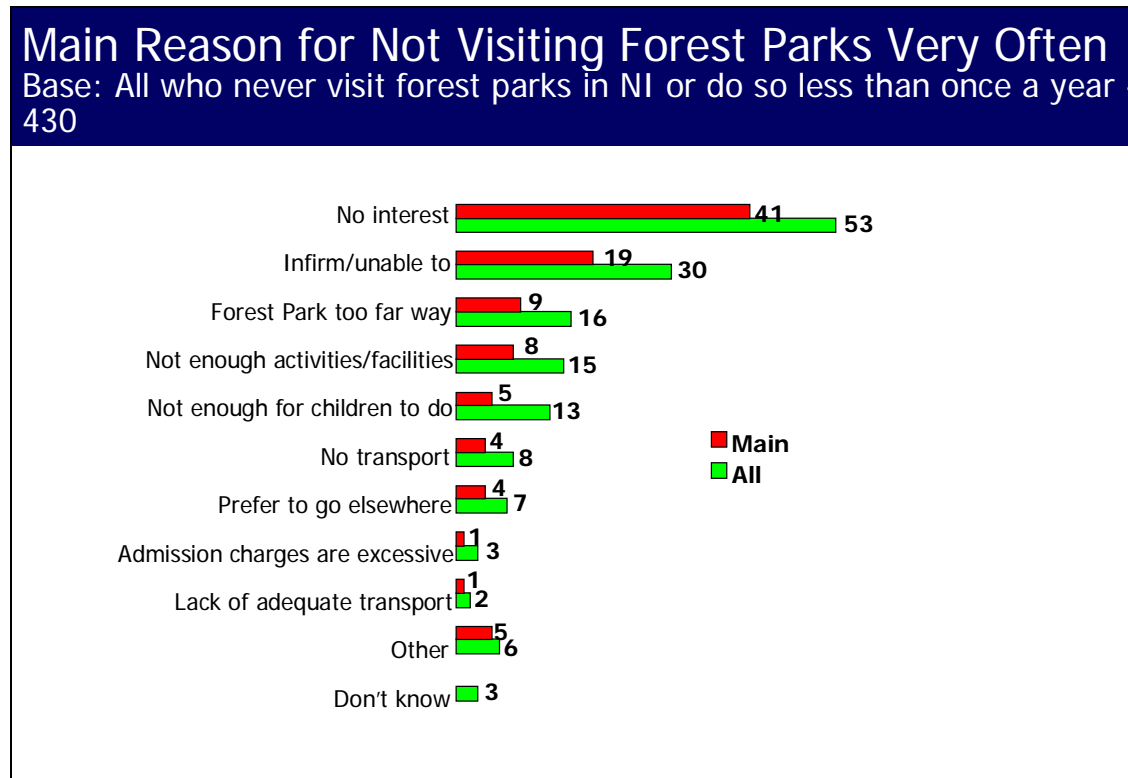
Individuals in the 'AB' social classes were more likely to visit Forest Parks more often ¹.



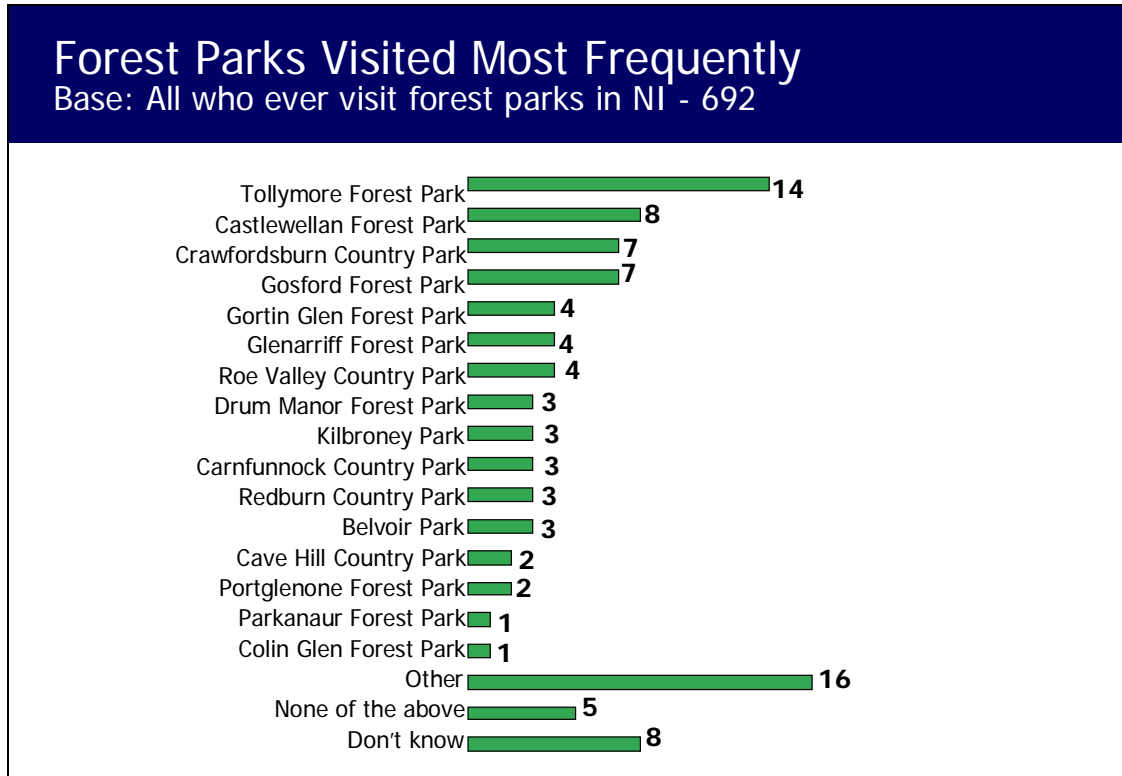
¹ The MRS social grade definitions have been in use for decades, and have become established as a generic reference series for classifying and describing social classes, especially for consumer targeting and consumer market research.

Social grade	Occupation
A	higher managerial, administrative or professional
B	intermediate managerial, administrative or professional
C1	supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional
C2	skilled manual workers
D	semi and unskilled manual workers
E	state pensioners or widows (no other earner), casual or lowest grade workers

Respondents who stated they never visit Forest Parks or visit Forest Parks less than once a year were asked to state the main reason why they did not visit a Forest Park more often. Approximately two in five (41%) had no interest in doing so, while a further 19% stated they were in poor health or unable to. Just under one in ten (9%) reported their nearest Forest Park was too far away.

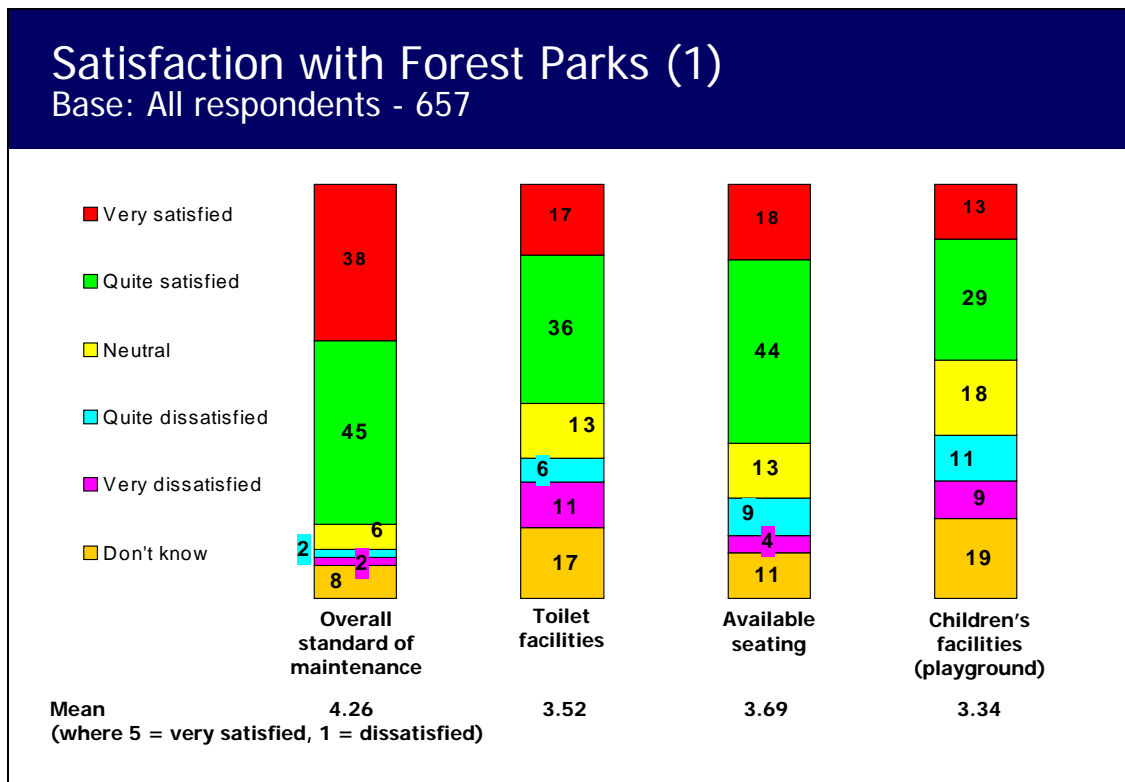


Of all respondents who had ever visited a Forest Park in Northern Ireland, the most frequently visited Forest Park was Tollymore, followed by Castlewellan, Crawfordsburn and Gosford.



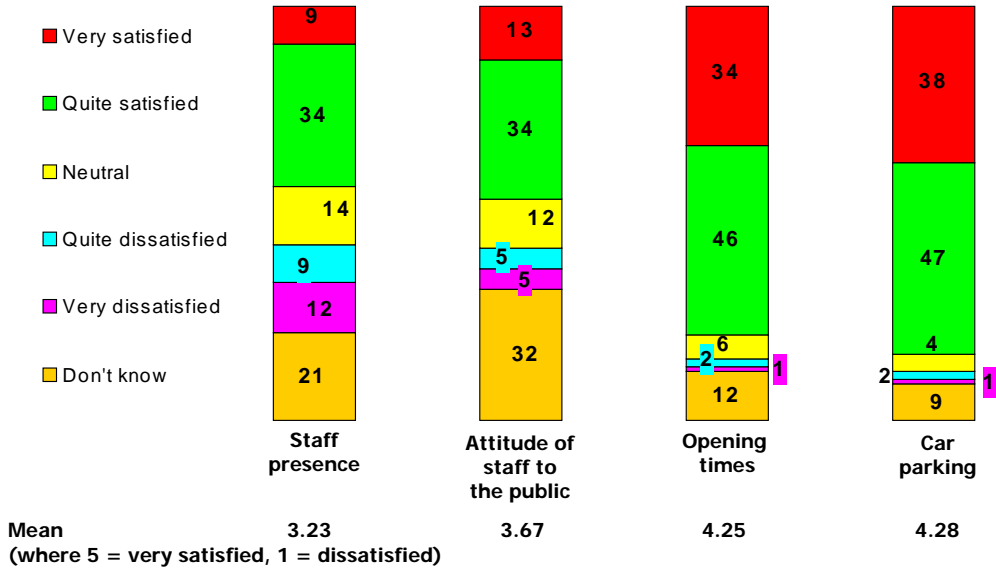
11.4 SATISFACTION WITH FOREST PARKS

Car parking, overall standard of maintenance, opening times and pathways were aspects in which respondents expressed greater satisfaction. Respondents tended to be less satisfied with staff presence and children's playground facilities.



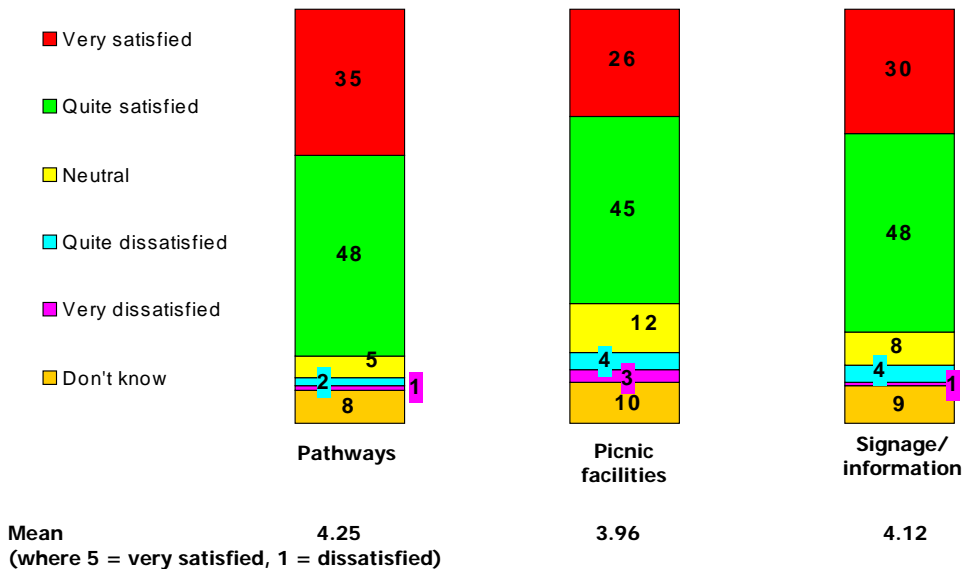
Satisfaction with Forest Parks (2)

Base: All respondents - 657



Satisfaction with Forest Parks (3)

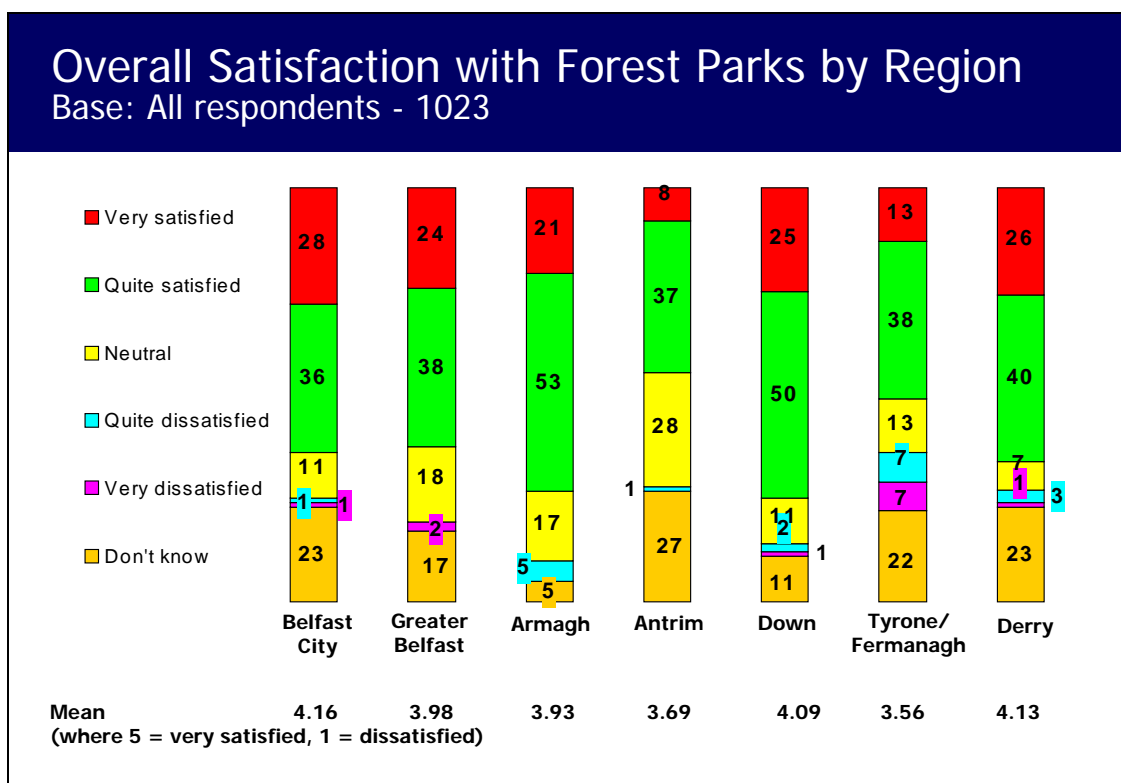
Base: All respondents - 657



Those aged 35-44 years were more likely to be very satisfied with the overall standard of maintenance of Forest Parks, while respondents living in Antrim and Armagh were less likely to be very satisfied with the standard of maintenance.

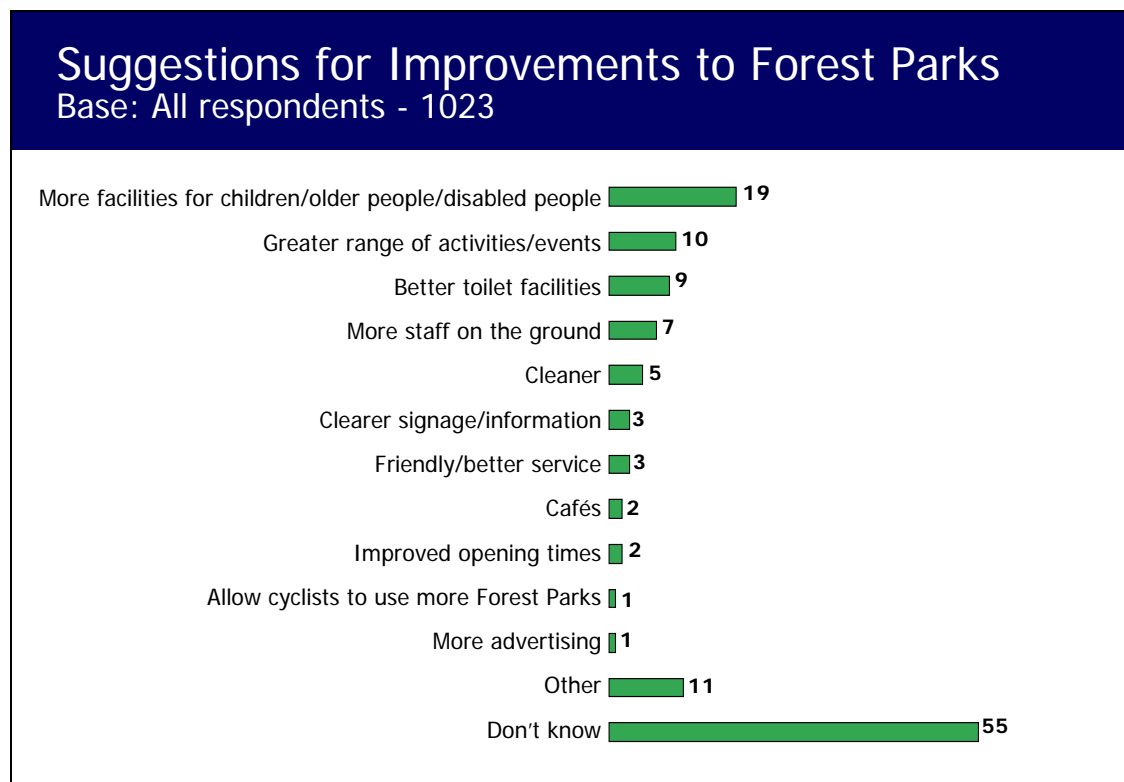
Respondents living in Derry and those in the lower social grades were more likely to be very satisfied with toilet facilities while those living in Antrim, Tyrone and Fermanagh were less satisfied with staff presence. AB's were more likely to be satisfied with car parking facilities, pathways and picnic facilities. Respondents in Derry were also more likely to be very satisfied with the standard of maintenance, available seating, opening times, car parking, pathways, picnic facilities, and signage/information than respondents living in any other area.

63% of all respondents stated they were either very satisfied or quite satisfied at an overall level with Forest Parks in Northern Ireland. Respondents living in Belfast City and Derry were the most satisfied.



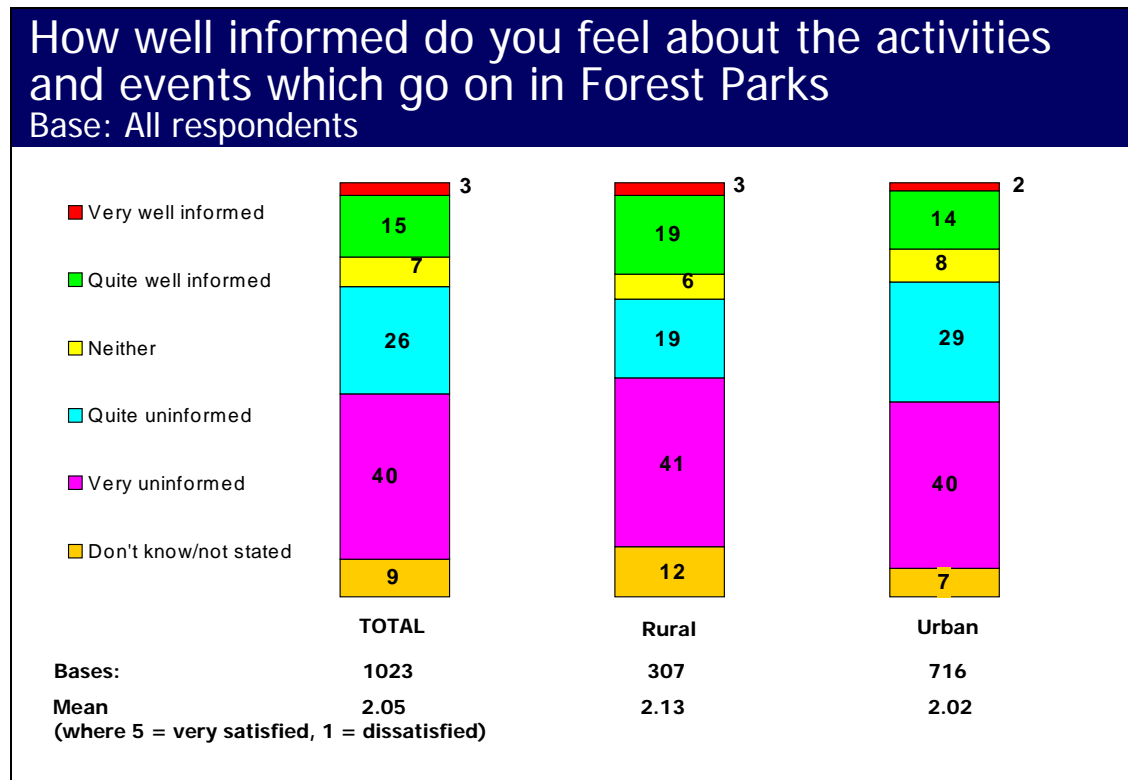
11.5 IMPROVEMENTS TO FOREST PARKS

More facilities for children, older people and the disabled was the top mention in terms of improving Forest Parks in Northern Ireland. One in ten stated 'a greater range of activities/events'.



11.6 HOW WELL INFORMED ABOUT ACTIVITIES OR EVENTS IN FOREST PARKS

Two thirds of respondents felt they were sufficiently uninformed about activities and events in Forest Parks. Respondents in rural areas felt slightly better informed than those living in urban areas.



11.7 GENERAL PUBLIC (OMNIBUS) SURVEY – SUMMARY

There was very little knowledge of DARD-funded Rural Development Programmes among those in rural areas. The only programme with any significant recognition was Peace and Reconciliation, and most of the awareness was at a prompted level. Just 1% of those in rural areas had participated in such schemes.

Just over one in five of all respondents felt that the Forest Service was responsible for the management and maintenance of forest parks in Northern Ireland. Almost half did not know who was responsible. Almost one in five visited forest parks once a month or more often, rising to almost a third among those in the AB social class.

The forest park visited most regularly was dependent on place of residence, but Tollymore, Castlewellan, Crawfordsburn and Gosford were most common.

Generally visitors to the forest parks were satisfied with the overall standard of maintenance and with most of the aspects in the parks. Lack of staff presence and lack of children's facilities were areas of less satisfaction, with around one in five visitors dissatisfied with each of these aspects. Suggested improvements included more facilities for children, greater range of events/activities, better toilet facilities and more staff on the ground. One area of concern is that two-thirds of respondents felt uninformed about activities and events happening in forest parks.

Appendices

Depth Interviews

This section highlights the key findings from the depth interviews. Some were used to inform the quantitative telephone study while others were stand-alone interviews.

Those informing the telephone study have been summarised by sector, while the stand-alone interviews have been summarised individually given that the sectors they cover, and organisations within sectors, are so diverse.

Depth Interviews Informing the Telephone (CATI) Surveys

AGRICULTURE PRIMARY PRODUCERS

Sub Category	No. of Interviews
Dairy	2
Cereals	2
Cattle and sheep	2
Small cattle and sheep	4
Pigs	2
Poultry	2
Horticulture (fruit)	1
Horticulture (veg)	1
Potatoes	1
Mushrooms	1
Equines	2

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Awareness

- Wide ranging levels of awareness of DARD's activities.
- The majority have some superficial awareness of DARD's activities and programmes, but no great in-depth knowledge unless they have applied for a particular programme or grant.
- Most find out about DARD's activities through the farming press (Farming Life and Irish Farmers' Journal were commonly cited). Also, through mail shots, or by talking to other farmers.

Contact

- Depending on issue, will deal with different .business units
- Generally, clear knowledge as to which individual they need to talk to (built up from experience) or at the very least clear knowledge of which department deals with the issue at stake.
- Variable level of contact with DARD. Some (e.g. pig farmers, mushroom growers) have little contact with DARD. Others (beef and cattle) farmers would have many more dealings.
- Mostly deal with DARD by phone – if can get issue dealt with over the phone that is sufficient. For more important issues or topics which cannot be dealt with over the phone, will see on face-to-face basis. Extremely limited use of e-mail among this group.
- Few had accessed DARD's services online. Those that had were mostly younger and used it mostly for filling in APHIS forms. They found this an extremely useful resource and were impressed with the layout/ease of use of the Website generally.

Customer Service

- Generally positive and most satisfied with customer service received either at local office or on phone – most commented on the friendliness of staff and their willingness to help and work with farmers.
- Any information was provided in a clear and easy to understand way.
- Staff were mostly able to deal with issues there and then and if not, would phone back with a response.
- No major issues surrounding customer service, although some pointed to decreased numbers at local office level, the lack of experience of some members of staff, and the high turnover rates. This prevents continuity of knowledge and relationships developing.
- Some issues surrounding Veterinary Service staff (both on ground and predominantly in local veterinary offices) – feeling that they are overly fussy, over-the-top, and don't always use common sense.
- Opening hours – some farmers feel that the current opening hours of local offices could be improved (to include a late night or Saturday morning were suggested), and that staff levels (and skills of staff) are inadequate for dealing with many of the queries they may have. They have noticed a marked decrease in staff levels over recent years.
- Feeling among some that there are too many staff employed by DARD and that it costs too much to run the Department, especially given the current conditions farmers are facing.

Funding

- Type of grant received depended on type of farming carried out.
- Some (pig, horse, mushroom, and cereal) did not receive any grants.
- Those who received grants mostly satisfied with how the current process works.
- No real problems surrounding the filling in of application forms – considered to be relatively straightforward and a lot easier to fill in than they were before.
- Payments system generally works well for some, but there were some issues surrounding payment, including the preference for a one off total payment rather than payment in a number of instalments which meant it was hard to keep track of what payments received. Also, takes a long time to receive payment – felt the process could be speeded up. There were also issues surrounding communication of outcomes for funding – many were not told until a considerable length of time had elapsed
- Most had grants paid into bank account (BACS). All were happy enough with this system.

Inspections

- Again, most were fairly satisfied with inspection process. For some, more contact than others. Virtually all farmers recognise the need for there to be an inspections' process and feel that it tends to work well.

- Some issues re: tagging of animals – felt that this was an extremely unsatisfactory process and did not work – was very frustrating and led to extra work for farmers. Also issues of over-zealousness and strict adherence to laws and procedures and a lack of common sense being applied at times, among staff (at an inspections level or regarding movement of animals).

Education and Training

- A large number of farmers had been on training courses.
- Tended to only go on courses which were of direct relevance to them or their business.
- More popular during off-peak periods (October to March).
- Some found it difficult to attend because of time commitments.
- Those that attended courses – found them extremely good – very happy with the content and quality of teaching on the courses (e.g. spraying courses). Felt some were more useful and relevant than others, but all were beneficial in some way. Also found courses a good way of catching up with others in the industry as to what was going on (networking).

Rural Development

- No farmers had applied for funding under Rural Development Programmes.
- Some had heard the term, but did not know what was involved. Others (minority) knew of the programmes but indicated they were not relevant to them.

Rural Connect

- Virtually no awareness of Rural Connect (or Rural Enterprise Advisers).

Agri-Environment Services

- Greater awareness of these schemes (especially the Countryside Management Scheme).
- Most had heard of the schemes, many knew nothing more than that, some had enquired about them but found them not be of direct relevance, others had applied and received funding.
- Of those who had received funding some found it a fairly straightforward process, others that there were too many rules and regulations and notification of acceptance was extremely slow in coming.
- Most of those that had heard of the schemes felt they were a good idea, and some indicated they may apply for funding for them at some stage in the future.
- Of those that were successful, the main motivating factor was to receive additional grant aid, while making use of unused land, while helping the environment. Found the application, payments and inspection process associated with the schemes all acceptable and straightforward.

Groups

- Most members of UFU.
- Others members of groups relating specifically to the industry they are in.
- Various levels of involvement – some pay fees and take no active part, some attend a couple of meetings a year, others attend regularly.
- Attendance largely driven by agenda and what topics are being discussed.
- Many groups have a strong practical element.
- Learn about the state of the industry, new methods, and (importantly) what other farmers are doing.
- DARD often sends speakers or hosts events and these are generally well received.
- See it as a good information-gathering and networking opportunity.

Veterinary Service

- Depending on type of farm, dealings more or less. Most were satisfied with the service provided – many did not use them for anything more than TB or Brucellosis testing. Found this system worked well and there were no major issues.

Science Service

- Levels of dealings with Science Service variable. Some use re: soil testing for pH levels etc., spray chemicals, apple testing, while others had no contact at all. Any who had contact, were satisfied with service received.

Policy

- No great consultation on policy at an individual farmer basis. Those that were members of groups felt there was some consultation, but were not sure of the value feeling that many decisions had already been made

Economics and Statistics

- All fill in their agricultural census form.
- See findings in farming press – most don't actively seek results.
- Results published in farming press are sufficient for the majority of farmers. Some (a minority) would like results published on website or sent out.

PROCESSING, MANUFACTURING AND ANCILLARY SECTORS

Sub Category	No. of Interviews
Food manufacturers	6
Importers/Exporters	1
Meat plants	4
Marts	1
PVPs	2
Equine industry	2

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Awareness of DARD

- Awareness of DARD and its activities – dependent on category - much more so among meat plants and meat and fish processors. Less so among bakery and other general manufacturers.
- Dealings with DARD variable depending on nature and type of category. Some have many dealings with DARD (contact on a daily basis) – others very little dealings (only now and again).

Contact with DARD

- Food manufacturers – by and large limited contact, but some have greater contact than others. Most in this sector have sporadic dealings with Loughry and that is their only contact.
- Importer/Exporter – fair amount of dealings with DARD on a number of issues.
- Meat plants – some have DARD vets on site so daily dealings in that respect. Other contact includes grants/subsidies; animals testing; veterinary service.
- Vets – private practices – deal with primarily on issue of export of animals.
- Equine – limited contact at the moment – only to do with licenses.
- Across the board, the most common way to deal with DARD is via telephone. If cannot get problem sorted by phone then will try and arrange a face-to-face meeting. Very little use of e-mail to contact DARD.

Local Offices

- Few in these sectors visit DARD local offices, but some issues surrounding opening times and staff issues – feel the local offices are under-staffed and only have limited opening times. Noted there had been a reduction in staff levels at local offices in recent years.

Online Services

- Very little use of DARD services online in these sectors. Many had no real need to use the services.
- Some would have used the Website for information, but very much the minority.

Customer Satisfaction

- Generally most satisfied with service received from DARD and found staff helpful, informative and knowledgeable.
- Those who only dealt with DARD via Loughry found the staff there extremely helpful and able. It was felt they were there to help the industry and were informative and knowledgeable. Felt that the services provided at Loughry were extremely useful and the information obtained very beneficial to the business. One person had issues surrounding the reliability of equipment, but was satisfied with staff.
- Generally the staff on the ground were well regarded. However, there were issues that the staff on the ground were bound by rules and regulations from above and could not use their common sense to make decisions – they had to act within the laws either from DARD or EU. Very few problems with the individuals personally, but some issues with the policies they were working under. They did not feel DARD personnel could make snap decisions but had to consult and conform to laws.
- Staff generally seen as good at providing information on time; answering queries; and helpful, but hands tied to an extent by legislation and policy made at higher levels.
- Feeling that those in higher levels do not consult enough with processors or individuals on the ground. Feeling that they should be consulted before policy initiatives – at the moment there is very little consultation and what there is occurs after policies have already been made.

Grants

- Depending on nature of business determine which grants (if any) received.
- Most of those interviewed across these sectors did not receive any grants from DARD.
- The dairy manufacturer received Peace 2 funding – found the application process complicated and “tortuous” in getting the money.

Inspections

- Level and type of inspections varied across sectors.
- Most found the inspections process satisfactory and had no problems with it – there were some issues with it being too strict and comments that there was no consistency between the process in NI and other European countries.
- All recognised the need for inspections and had no problems with the majority of staff carrying out the inspections, although some noted that the procedures and overall process was overly bureaucratic and convoluted.

Veterinary Science

- Meat processors and marts had mixed views on the veterinary service. The staff on the ground were seen to be doing their job, but the feeling was that their activities were being governed by laws made from above or from the EU. There were no problems with the individuals on the ground only with the laws and policies in which they were forced to operate.
- There was a feeling that staff were forced to implement laws to the letter and were too picky and also that there was a lack of consistency between the interpretation and application of laws and policies. The feeling is that this enforcement is more strictly applied than it is in other European countries (e.g. ROI, Spain, Greece), which puts processors here at a disadvantage.
- There was also a belief that staff (especially on-site) were being burdened by too much administration and bookwork at the expense of their normal jobs and were not in the position where they could use common sense or make snap decisions – they were bound by laws dictated from above.
- Recognise need for enforcement and adherence to laws, but feeling the Marts are at direct odds with veterinary service policy re: movement of animals – DARD want to restrict movement, marts need greater movement – feeling that there needs to be some compromise, but does not seem to be.

PVP (Private Veterinary Practitioners)

- Individuals in this area were happy with service they received from DARD. Most dealings relate to the export of animals and they find this programme extremely good and well run. No issues surrounding documentation – clear what needs to be done, there is a fast turnaround and staff are very helpful and accommodating.

Education Training

- Among this category, mixed level of awareness of courses available through CAFRE. Those who have few dealings with DARD do not have same levels of awareness. Most of the others feel that DARD is good at keeping them up to date with the courses that are available, although there were some issues about not knowing about courses until it was too late – would like more advanced notice.
- Not many in this sector had actually attended courses – some have attended courses on Environmental Health and basic hygiene, but the general feeling among this sector was that many of the courses are not particularly relevant for them (given their size or the nature of their business) and are also hard to attend (especially among SME owner/managers) as it involves taking time off.
- Some also felt that other organisations (e.g. PVP - AVSPNI and BSAVA) better catered for their needs and had more relevant courses.
- One indicated they would like to see more specific courses (boning/deboning courses – was not aware of any such courses).

- Some did send their staff on courses. For example, one PVP sent staff to Royal College of Veterinary Sciences course run through Greenmount. Staff found the course extremely informative from both a theoretical and practical basis. Found that staff returned much better prepared for working in the industry.

Advice

- As mentioned previously, a number of firms in this sector (primarily food manufacturers) had availed of the services provided by Loughry.
- They found the facilities and services extremely beneficial to their business in terms of advice, product manufacture, process, and new product development point of view. It had helped firms make decisions regarding new products or found better ways of operating and producing existing offerings. One general producer had used independent labs and found Loughry on a par with them.
- Those who had used Loughry, found the staff helpful and knowledgeable with a real desire to help firms.
- One person had issues surrounding the reliability of equipment, but was satisfied with staff.

Groups

- Individuals in these groups were not directly involved with any farmers groups. Most were members of an organisation specific to their industry.

Science Service

- Most of the individuals in this sector had very few dealings with the Science Service.
- The dairy producer dealt with Newforge mainly for discussing issues, but felt they could be more responsive. One or two food manufacturers had used services in Stormont.
- Most of the others were aware of services in Newforge (and to a lesser extent Stormont) but had not used them.

Policy

- The majority felt that there should be more consultation from DARD with the industry (or key players in the sector) as they could bring their experience and knowledge to the process.
- The feeling is predominantly that even where DARD does consult, this is only paying lip-service and seen to be consulting as decisions have already been made and laws formulated. Individuals would prefer to be consulted before laws are drawn up and have input at that stage, where their views can make a difference.
- There is also the feeling that policies are too strictly adhered to on the ground vis-à-vis other European countries. This means NI producers are at a competitive disadvantage compared to cheap imports. This causes resentment as processors do not feel they are operating on a level playing field.

RURAL COMMUNITY/COMMUNITY FUNDERS

Sub Category	No. of Interviews
RDC	1
RCN	1
BSP groups	1
LEADER +	1
NRRTI Partnerships	1
Community based regeneration projects	1
Peace II – farmers groups	1
Peace II – local delivery companies	1

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Awareness of DARD

- In capacity as farmer awareness of DARD limited. As a group member get to know much better. (BSP).
- Sources of awareness – press, bulletins, advisory service.
- All others were in regular contact with DARD. Relationships generally perceived as good.

Contact with DARD

- Main means of contact were face to face and telephone. Email was also used.
- Users rated Website as informative (almost half).
- Individual on Peace 2 programme found Website useful for form filling and for finding out information about the programme, but felt that for some issues it was necessary to speak to someone.
- Opening hours generally perceived as fine. However one farmer (BSP) felt that a late night opening during the week at the local office would help – usually do bookwork at night. Also important to extend opening hours to accommodate the voluntary sector.
- Offices rated as accessible (best aspect).
- Décor and appearance not rated important at all. If appearance is invested in, perceived as money poorly spent (there are other areas of greater priority for investment).
- No issues in terms of staff courtesy or staff friendliness. Responses were also regarded as comprehensive.
- Clarity of roles is improving.

DARD Customer Service

- Wide variation – some very good, some poor. Dependent on the individual dealing with – in some cases asking to speak to someone in a position of greater authority enables a quicker and more satisfactory response. “You have to go higher to get a response” (BSP). Others felt that admin staff were not good at dealing with queries.
- Feeling among one individual that there were too many staff and costs to run the department were too high.

- Others perceived that the service was not consistent across business units– “the sympathy and understanding of community development varies”.
- Rated much the same as any other public sector organisation, the ‘civil service culture’.
- Customer service staff were also rated as lacking in terms of “understanding the nature of on-the-ground issues”
- No shortage of literature.

Improvements to Service

- Always room for improvement.
- Need to promote themselves more, improve general public relations/awareness. More local contact, more favourable publicity.
- “Not as farmer friendly as it could be” (BSP) – perceived as a “policing service against farmers” (BSP). Suggestions were made of an assistance role, rather than policing.
- Need to improve response times, become more efficient in terms of processing applications and feeding back a response. Process rated too slow at present. Great sense of urgency to get the information to the DARD representative, but not reciprocated as there is no urgency from DARD re: decisions or feedback.
- On-line communication with DARD was well received, mainly perceived as a better use of time. Particular appeal to farmer (BSP) – after hours working.
- Future policy making in terms of rural development was regarded as particularly slow.
- Reduce levels of bureaucracy – too much red tape. “There is more money spent to cover backs ... there is more money spent than the value of the delivery”.
- Better autonomy at local level, more local delivery.

Funding

- Variety of funding mentioned.
- Perceptions that although form filling has become less complicated, it is still a laborious and difficult task with no guarantee of financial assistance.
- Form filling should be proportionate to the level of aid requested.
- “We’re living within a very bureaucratic regime” - perceived culture of DARD.
- Forms perceived as much too intense for small amounts of money.
- At an overall level, general perception that there is too much ‘policing’ and inspection and not enough tolerance of genuine mistakes.

Inspection

- All recognised the need for some inspections process.
- Generally appreciated that inspection was necessary, although danger of “being regulated out of business” (BSP).
- Others commented on the amount of inspections – there are too many. Need a better co-ordination and sharing of information. Essentially less duplication of effort.
- Others felt inspections process was necessary and since public money was being spent it was only right that it was accounted for in a rigorous and thorough manner.

- Also strong perceptions that DARD is extremely risk adverse and that there needs to be more flexibility. While respondents appreciated the need for inspection (and for accountability), the inspection process should be based both on track record and level of funding awarded – at the moment it is too bureaucratic and stifling innovation.
- “The Department work in a totally risk adverse environment...you cannot encourage innovation”.
- Appreciated need controlled risk.

Education, Training and Lifelong Learning/People Development

- Sources of awareness were generally press, local group meetings or through an advisor (BSP).
- One off courses/modular courses much more popular.
- Limited awareness of the CAFRE name.
- Awareness of Loughry, Greenmount and Enniskillen campuses but limited awareness of courses available in each.
- Suggestions for improvement – more courses/training for women in rural areas.
- “E-learning crucial to rural constituencies”.

Rural Development

- Positives – “providing a future for rural areas”, social and community aspects.
- Negatives – leadership and forward planning need to become a priority – be urgent and robust.
- Agriculture and rural development – “a family fall out” – needs to be addressed. Perceived too much separation between agriculture and rural development.
- “Innovation is stifled by red tape”
- Need rural White paper but perceived reluctance in DARD to endorse as the way forward.
- Suggestions that delivery could be better done by subsidiary agencies further down the chain. “Let the agents take the risks within a controlled environment”
- “They need to analyse their role in delivery ...hand out to the agent closer to the client base”. Suggested that DARD should then focus on developing policy, financial control and audit.
- Current “chain of command is too long” – “give offices more local autonomy to make decisions”.
- Perceived important to rationalise the number of people who are delivering locally.
- Access to programmes perceived difficult – too many rules and regulations, too complicated.
- Have one single integrated programme, simplify the whole funding process, make it easier to administer. At the moment there are too many agencies and programmes – the whole process needs to be simplified and made less complicated.
- Process rated as complicated – “over the head of 95% of farmers” (BSP).
- Future planning in terms of rural development was rated as weak “they just haven’t been doing the thinking”.

- One person believed that rural development programmes were wasting money on farms that were no longer viable and supporting farmers who should no longer be in the industry. The feeling from this individual was that investment should be geared towards those farmers with a good track record and who were going to survive in the industry.

Rural Connect

- Vague awareness. No understanding of service (BSP).
- Wider education needed in rural areas.
- Individual on Peace 2 programme has reference book – is a good source of information, but from background and experience has good knowledge of who to speak to on various issues.

Rural Portal Website

- Limited awareness.
- One respondent had accessed site.
- Perceived as easy to navigate but weak on RD and Leader.
- Kept up to date.

Agri Environment Services

- CMS and ESA were particularly well known. Rated well – “adds money to the rural economy”.
- One individual felt these schemes were of no use from an economic point of view to those who need to make a living out of farming. Felt that this funding was being used to support those who should no longer be in the industry or those who were coming out of farming.

Groups

- Majority of respondents interviewed were members of local groups.
- Rated as “integral to get work done” and very important for networking.
- Expectations were for mutual gain – reduce costs, increase returns from marketing and increase knowledge. Discussions mainly on “farming politics and day to day issues” (BSP).

Veterinary Service

- BSP only one with contact in terms of routine animal traceability. Rated as a reasonable service. Again greater consultation suggested as an improvement, as well as not testing in the summer months – only in the event of an outbreak. It would be much more convenient when the cattle are housed.
- Other on Peace 2 programme – had issues regarding the quality of administrative staff and felt that there were too many vets in DARD in relation to the number of farms.

Science Service

- Limited knowledge.

Policy

- An area all respondents were very keen to become more involved in. Greater industry consultation was preferred and expected, especially at an earlier stage of the policy creation process. It was felt these individuals would have a clearer knowledge of the issues facing farmers on the ground.
- Some were sceptical of decision making process and concern was expressed over value “takes a long time to get the message through” (BSP).
- “Too many decisions are made high up ... need more local autonomy, more use of local partnerships and more consultation”.
- “Need to help the customer and not protect the process”.
- “They need to take risks, shortcuts now and again ... make decisions quickly at a local level”.
- Strong feeling that there could be more industry consultation at an earlier stage in policy-making stage.
- Fresh debate welcomed in terms of future of society in NI.
- Need a board rural affairs agenda. Perceived there is currently no policy on rural development, just rural development programmes.
- DARD needs to become a champion of rural development “hold on to their brief”.
- Feeling that DARD needs to be more “farmer friendly” in regards the implementation of legislation.
- From a IT training point of view, there was a feeling that there could be more input from specialists into the design and content of the courses to make them more relevant and useful to farmers.

Economics & Statistics

- Only minority of respondents had participated. Majority of others (who were not aware of the surveys) were interested in finding out results and would like a summary to either be posted out or put on the Website.

FISHING AND AQUACULTURE

Sub Category	No. of Interviews
Aquaculture	1
Harbour Authority	1
Fishing Organisation	1

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Awareness of DARD

- Among Aquaculture and vessel owner - limited knowledge of DARD.
- Much greater awareness of their activities among Harbour Authority individual.

Contact with DARD

- Fisherman and Aquaculture individual – main dealings with inspectors and for licences.
- Application for Aquaculture licence – met with DARD and agreed on area that could be farmed.
- Fisherman - contact primarily on an informal basis with shore based inspectors and patrol boat at sea. Got to know them quite well.
- Contact irregular – can meet frequently or not for a long time.
- Little formal contact.
- Harbour Authority individual has more regular contact with DARD in the shape of formal quarterly meetings – meets with DARD at a high level. This contact has increased in recent years. This contact would take place on a face-to-face basis and there would also be some contact over the phone or by e-mail to deal with other day-to-day issues.
- Fishermen and Aquaculture would deal with issues over the phone or discuss face-to-face when they seem them.
- No real use of DARD services on-line.

DARD Customer Service

- Generally satisfied overall.
- Fisherman – little contact, save for renewing licence (by post) and with inspectors – good at their job – no problems with them.
- Aquaculture individual – dealing with staff re: licence - found staff helpful and knowledgeable and able to answer any questions.
- Generally impressed with service from inspectors – no hidden agendas; are up to speed and able to inform; if doing something wrong would tell you to stop it – not too heavy handed straight away.
- Good at sending out information – laws change so rapidly they are good at keeping you abreast of changes.
- For under 10 metre licences, one individual felt that staff were under directions not to issue licences – was not sure if this was the individual or department.
- Some issues re: replying to queries – can sometimes take a long time for the Department to respond.

Grants

- None for fisherman and Aquaculturalist, but some issues.
- Improvements to grants process – could be more proactive. Could let fishermen know if there are grants which might be available to them.
- Feeling that foreign boats appear to be getting all the grants.
- Would like to see grants for updating gear and equipment – lot of it is old and needs replaced, but very expensive to do without assistance. For smaller fishermen particularly, is impossible to buy new boats – too expensive – so need to bring older vessels up to date and should have help to do that.
- For other – grant funded – process of getting funds tortuous. Filling in forms and documentation required is tortuous.
- Would prefer system of being able to draw down funding (in the form of staged payments) as and when require it, rather than the current system of getting a lump sum and having to use it all at once.

Inspections

- No problems with land or sea-based inspectors – feeling that they do a good job.
- Inspections system works well – come down and tell you of EU directives. Good attitude – not confrontational – adopt a “do you know” approach rather than “are you complying with...”.
- System is fair – totally random – not picking on the same person all the time. Recognise need for inspections – if no inspections, the sea would be wiped out.

Groups

- One member of NIFPO – pay subs and attend AGM – little else. Organisation works with DARD on a number of issues – relationship sometimes strained.
- One belongs to Kilkeel branch of NIFPO – role is to keep members informed of EC rules. He does not feel there is a need for this organisation – thinks the government should look after all fishermen’s affairs. Begrudges paying 1½% of catch to them per year – feels crew should be getting it. He does not trust them or think they are representing fishermen’s best interests. They do not always know what is best for fishermen even though they think they do.

Veterinary Service

- Minimal dealings, likely to be more in future.
- More dealings with Environmental Health Officers if have problems with catch (oysters etc.).

Science Service

- Little dealings.
- Previously had more contact – used to come out to gather information re: the size of herrings and the areas in which they were being fished.
- Some dealings with Queen’s on issues relating to the amounts of issues being brought into Strangford Lough and pollution issues associated with them.

Policy

- Feeling that DARD need to have more direct contact with fishermen and consult them more on policy issues. No great levels of consultation at present direct with fishermen (any is through representative bodies).
- Opinion that the Harbour Authority could be consulted more on certain issues and in advance of DARD press statements being released etc.
- Belief that there needs to be a clearer strategic policy and direction for the fishing industry for the next 3-5 years, to give a clear view of how the industry could move forward. At the moment there does not seem to be clear forward planning.
- Feeling that DARD (and staff) could have a more business focus and ethos.

Fish Health

- Keep fairly up to date with issues on fish health.
- Generally satisfied with help and advice received in this area.
- Did not really feel there was much more the department could do in this area.

Aquaculture

- Satisfied with current licensing procedure – process works well and staff involved are helpful.
- Consulted with DARD on Aquaculture issues – drew up map of places and co-ordinates where could farm. Found staff helpful and informative.

Licensing

- Generally happy with current licensing procedures.
- Issues relating to unlicensed fishing – feeling that DARD should be more active in discouraging unlicensed fishing. Needs to be a change to the law – at the moment can only be prosecuted if caught selling catch on – needs to be if they are in possession. DARD know the people involved but are powerless to act – feels there need to be a change in the law to give DARD more power in this area.
- Also concerns about DARD handing out licences “willy nilly” and concern of impact of possible UK zones.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Sub Category	No. of Interviews
Secondary/Grammar schools	2
Students – Student Committee	3
Lifelong Learning	2

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Awareness of DARD

- Most recognise DARD by Green writing/letter heads and farmers in particular associate DARD with paperwork.
- Most know that Loughry deals with food science, Greenmount with Agriculture and Horticulture and think that Enniskillen is equine or 'horsey'.
- Students of the 3 colleges know less about DARD's other activities beyond the colleges (and funding there).
- The farmers are aware of DARD in terms of farming e.g., relation to permits/schemes/grants.
- Farmers get impression that DARD is changing – becoming more friendly, branching out.

Contact with DARD

- Teachers receive information from DARD and attend Open Days. Home Economics teachers have a personal contact with Loughry.
- Most prefer contact by post, but telephone is well liked for quick responses.
- While the Teachers and farmers deal directly with DARD, the students tend to deal through a staff intermediary.

Local Offices

- The farmers tend to visit the DARD local offices more, although now that they are using online services such as Aphis there is less need.
- Many aware of Dundonald House.

Online Services

- The college students do not use DARD services online but they do access their own internal Websites and would click on links there to find out more – so far they have had no real need to use the services.
- The farmers used the Ruralni Website for the APHIS system, and were very happy with this.

Image of DARD colleges

- The overall image of the DARD colleges is good. In particular, the schools like their pupils to do courses there because they are very practical and they have up to date facilities. The students like the intimacy and 'hands on' nature of the colleges.

Education and Training

- Courses could be promoted more, especially Greenmount and Enniskillen.
- Like practical nature of courses.
- Financial reward was a big incentive for one farmer, as was the pressure that GPA would in the future become obligatory.
- Many of the students are taking extra courses which are on offer.

Course Delivery

Teachers

- Easier for teachers as one day – only ask for one days cover and more likely to get to go – doesn't cost school as much money.

For College Students

- Some lecturers are 'brilliant' and a minority 'let you down' (can be because of way of teaching, lack of knowledge or maternity leave-normally deal through the Student council).
- Emphasis on presentations really important and interactive teaching methods generally used and liked. E.g., given a question, and the lecturer goes round the class for an answer 'makes you think'/go off and research a topic and then present back to the class.
- HR Management particularly liked.
- Trips to the industry are very important for building up contacts and practical knowledge.

For GFP and BQI

- Evening courses are best.
- Like the farm visits/going away from the farm because they can see what is happening on different farms, and gets you away from your own.
- Likes the fact that there are 4 parts to most of the courses, mainly because it gives you time in between to work at home 'gives you time to simmer and think' – easier to work into schedule.
- Needs to be local – don't want to travel.

Comparison to other colleges

For students

- While the 3 colleges are seen as well equipped, and have good facilities, the internet café in Greenmount is envied and Loughry is seen as better equipped socially than the other colleges because it has a bar.

- What all 3 colleges have in common is that they are all very close (due to small numbers - you build up a good relationship). Unlike bigger colleges, the staff are very easygoing, they work closely with their lecturers and know them by name. This was perceived as a major advantage.
- More practical approach than other colleges leaving you more 'industry ready'.
- The schools also had a favourable opinion of Loughry – one teacher had the impression that even if you go to Queens, you still have to go to Loughry to use the facilities.

Online Access

- While the students do use the internet they have not accessed the DARD Website but they do use the college Website.
- Both farmers interviewed used the APHIS system / seen as a good time saving device – less prone to human error. If human error arises – easier dealt with. However, both found it by accident – taught themselves/son's help.
- Generally the Ruralni Website is well received by the farmers.
- The teachers had not accessed any of the Websites.

Further Career Prospects/Lifelong Learning/Industry Ready

- Teachers are aware of Open Days at Loughry and the promotional materials sent through.
- Students are mainly optimistic about opportunities out there. They get support in their career searching through the college e.g., library resources, personal contacts, contact with industry recruitment agencies, study trips, work placements. General feeling they are ready to go out and work specifically because of the practical side of their studies.
- One of the farmers felt that he could better answer questions having done the GFP course. The practical farm visits also make the learning more alive.

Science Service

- If they needed research, the farmers would contact the Science service – one would contact Hillsborough or Newforge. Areas of particular interest for both would be types of feed or rations.

Customer Satisfaction

Overall satisfaction levels are very high.

- The students are very happy and total advocates of each college. Staff are seen as very good and helpful across all areas e.g., lecturers, accommodation staff, restaurant staff, facilities are improving and there is a good balance between the practical and the classroom.
- Farmers on the GFP and BQI courses are pretty satisfied, and know some of the DARD representatives on a name to name basis - the staff are usually friendly.
- Teachers are quite satisfied, particularly in the consistency of service.

How to improve

Teachers

- The timing of the Basic Food Hygiene course does not suit since it is too close to 5th year exams - best time for 5th years would be September/October/November.
- Send more information, and perhaps more varied information.
- Online information resources would be useful e.g., the Dairy Council where you can download worksheets, Eggs Education, the Consumer Council, BBC Revision etc.
- Provide a college closer/pay for transport/run local courses in local facilities - contact is constrained by budget.

Students

- Have more co-operation between the DARD colleges 'we never get to see Greenmount' (Enniskillen student). Mainly because it is too far and you need a car. Currently trying to get an online forum where students from all 3 campuses can chat. By more co-operation, they could learn from each other e.g., how Loughry sorted out their restaurant problems, the bar, how it promotes its courses.
- Difficulties in getting to each of the colleges – although there are some buses – the general feeling is that you need a car.
- Perception that there is a lack of advertising of some of the colleges, e.g., Enniskillen and Greenmount (in relation to horticulture).
- The Catering facilities could be improved in Enniskillen and Greenmount.
- Would like an Internet café like Greenmount and a bar like Loughry – realise this is constrained by under 18s.
- Offer more courses e.g., National Diploma in Food Supply Management.
- Rules are too strict for over 18s in the dorms in Greenmount – basically, the over 18s feel it is unfair that the same rules apply to them as the under 18s.

Farmers

- Better promotion of Ruralni –APHIS system could be advertised more –both found it by accident. Need to educate/train people about it. Make APHIS available for the sheep sector.
- Need to be sensitive to farmer's schedules –depending on the time of year/what they have on.
- Introduce other courses e.g., a dog handling course, course on how to market themselves - get together to promote local produce/Angus beef. Computer courses should focus on the basics of computers.
- Staff issues: DARD could be a bit more willing to admit mistakes. Perception that there is a high turnover of Clerical staff. They also do not know about the industry – should be trained. Sometimes feel they are 'up against a brick wall' or on a 'wild goose chase' being passed from person to person. Sometimes the speed of responses could be improved.
- Hillsborough could get more involved on the Beef side, at the moment they are more involved with the Dairy sector.
- More farm trips.
- Used to publish a newsletter – perhaps reintroduce that/monthly magazine?
- Promote what's on offer more.

FORESTRY

Sub Category	No. of Interviews
Farm Woodland Premium Scheme and Woodland Grant Scheme	2
Recreation and public access users	1
Large Sawmill and Timber merchants	1
Small Sawmill and Timber merchants	1

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Awareness of Forest Service

- Limited awareness of Forest Service among those on FWPS and WGS – most of dealings carried out through intermediary organisation (Scottish Woodlands and Farm Relief mentioned).
- Sawmill customers knew activities of Forest Service (on timber side) quite well.

Contact with Forest Service

- Variable depending on customer type.
- Some (e.g. the larger sawmill customer) would be in contact with the Forest Service quite regularly. The harvesting manager in this firm would be in contact with them on a regular basis regarding operational issues (risk assessments etc.) Would also be in fairly regular contact with Forest Service marketing manager at a more strategic level (two formal meetings per year).
- Others (those on schemes) would have limited dealings – only real dealings with DARD were at start of the scheme and inspection.
- Caravanner have dealings when renewing license and sometimes with rangers at forest parks.
- Most of contact is by phone, or on a face-to-face basis. E-mail is also becoming more popular.
- Majority of all types were satisfied with the service they received. The quality of information provided and helpfulness and knowledge of staff were all rated highly. Good working relationships had been built up.
- None of those interviewed had any need to access Forest Service services on-line, but were not averse to doing so if required.

Forest Service District Offices/Team

- Sawmill customers deal with individuals in these offices, but mostly by phone or they come to their premises – no real need to visit the local offices. Find staff responsive and easy to get on, with genuine interest and concern. Have developed a good working relationship with individuals in offices.
- Other customer types have no visit or contact with regional offices.

- Team used most was the harvesting team to deal with issues relating to timber sales (thinning and felling were mentioned) and tenders etc. Also dealings with Forest Service on issues of health and safety (dumping of trees in forests, height to pile logs etc.) and on issues relating to the roads infrastructure in forests.
- Those on schemes limited contact – only at application stage and not directly. Apply through intermediary.
- High levels of satisfaction with service received. Good working relationships have been built up over time.

Permits

- Caravanner had a Touring in the Trees permit. Found out about the scheme through relations who had joined the scheme.
- Found application form easy to fill in.
- Bring application form to Dundonald House and get key – would prefer if could do this by post as it means having to make a journey for just one errand.
- Also have pass for larger forest parks.

Forest Parks Visiting and Use

- Caravanner visited forest parks regularly.
- Visited those sites in the Touring in the Trees scheme mostly, but also larger forest parks quite often for day trips.
- Visited all sites and through trial and error found the sites which they prefer and would tend to visit those most often (Castlewellan, Gosford, Springwell)
- Visit most weekends from March through to October. Leave on Friday night and back on Sunday – would sometimes go shopping on the Saturday afternoon. Main reason for trips though are for the caravanning – meet up with friends and relatives who are also caravanners on the sites and have a social gathering.
- Sometimes go on day trip to forest parks (e.g. Tollymore), but most of trips are for caravanning weekend.
- Also, goes cycling in forest parks and used to go horse riding in them.
- Caravanner has had dealings with the rangers at forest parks – any that have dealt with have been very helpful, very pleasant and amenable, and well informed (able to tell where doctors are etc.). Very accommodating – will try and help.

Touring in the Trees Scheme

- Likes the scheme and thinks it is well run and good value for money.
- Facilities in the sites in the scheme are basic and there are not a lot of amenities. Only some of sites have hot water and toilet facilities – would like to have good toilet facilities and hot water on all sites – would pay slightly more (up to £150 per year) for better facilities, but realises there is a balance between level of facilities and cost of permit for scheme.
- Likes the fact that sites on the scheme are quieter and smaller – suits their age range more.

- Only complaints are around people letting their dogs off leads in sites and public access walkways through sites – doesn't feel there should be public walkways through sites. Also issue of public not cleaning up dog mess.
- Other slight issue is that there is no one on the Springwell site at times. Doesn't like leaving the caravan with no one around and with the public car park beside the site.
- Also, parking on one side of Touring the Trees scheme site in Castlewellan slopes and is not that good for parking the caravan.
- Recognises that these are minor issues – overall is extremely satisfied with scheme and uses it most weekends.

Grants

FWPS (Farm Woodland Premium Scheme)

- FWPS – one individual got involved as had a piece of land which had become marginal and would cost too much to bring it up to a suitable standard. Contributing reason was to get money from land. Knew of agri-environmental schemes and contacted Scottish Woodlands to see if land would be viable for any schemes.
- Scottish Woodlands contacted DARD and dealt with whole process (from applications through to inspection).
- Worked with Scottish Woodlands regularly – very little direct contact with DARD.
- One inspection to see right number and type of trees planted – dealt with by Scottish Woodlands. Process seems to work well.
- Feels scheme is good for marginal land and provides a good return.
- Believes larger grants are needed to encourage people to plant more trees.
- Found application process straightforward and no issues surrounding payment.

WGS (Woodland Grant Scheme)

- WGS – individual got involved in this scheme for tree plantation at their house. Had empty fields doing nothing. Heard about the scheme through a friend who was on it.
- Called DARD and they sent out info re: the scheme and a list those organisations involved in planting trees. Picked a company from the list (Farm Relief) – contacted them and person came out and gave advice on type of trees to plant and where
- Found application form easy enough to fill in and clear enough – Farm Relief person was helpful.
- No problems surrounding payment.
- Submitted application and notified of acceptance onto scheme after 3-4 months – felt that this was too long to wait – one month would be more realistic.
- One inspection to see trees planted – dealt with by Farm Relief.
- Feels WGS is a good scheme – believes that being encouraged to plant trees enhances the countryside and the area where you live.
- Grant was key motivating factor – acknowledges that they wouldn't have planted trees themselves without grant assistance.

Sawmills

Smaller sized mills

- Main issue for smaller sawmill surrounded the quality of timber bought from DARD. The type of wood was not straight and tended to stick in machines which meant a lot of waste and cost (double handling).
- Problem is that trees (larch) have been planted 20 years ago – they were easy to sell then, but now the market has changed and what sold then, doesn't now. Such a long time to change the situation as takes 20 years or more for trees to grow. Feel need to start planting spruce trees.
- Frustrating that has to tender quarterly in order to buy wood – no guarantee that will be successful. Good point is that DARD have more flexible payment terms.
- Now buys most of timber from Coillte – better quality and can buy more frequently – much less waste. Drawback is that they have to be paid immediately.
- Would like to be able to segregate timber – Coillte sell cut length trees and segregate them.
- Has been on health and safety course for storing timber at Pomeroy – found it useful, although difficult to implement, where men are paid by the amount of wood they collect and pile.

Larger sized mills

- Feels that the Forest Service needs to work closely with the industry (processors) and other key stakeholders (e.g. Invest NI) to have a clear strategy as to how the industry should develop. Believes that a lot of work is needed to safeguard the industry and ensure growth in the future. Recognises that there are a lot of pressures and issues that need to be addressed e.g. shortage of wood in Ireland and over-capacity.
- Feels that this needs to come from the Forest Service – they need to drive the change and lead the way.
- Believes that the Forest Service are positively disposed towards the industry and do work with them, but really need to think strategically as to the future.
- Would like to see all timber standing, which means that they can process the timber cheaper and have more control over what is happening with the tree.
- Feels that Forest Service (at ground level – Harvesting Team) – need to be more commercially aware and focussed. Need to better understand what is required in a business environment.
- Has noticed a change for the better in forestry thinking in last 3-4 years. Long-term contracts are much better as it gives confidence to the producer as they know they are guaranteed fixed amounts of wood at a fixed price. This means they can plan much better.
- Finds procedures and bureaucracy frustrating.
- Recognises obligations from a health and safety point of view and works closely with Forest Service on these.

- Mixed view of grants. Feels that any grants should be very specifically targeted and only for the betterment of the industry (to established firms in for the long-term) and would be welcomed by many. Danger with grant system is that a lot of unprofessional people will come into the industry with a short-term approach, pick up the grants, and then disappear. View is that if the project does not stand up without grant aid, then there is something wrong with the project.
- Some issues regarding quality of wood – feels Forest Service thinks their product is better than it is – this has far-reaching consequences when negotiating prices and makes them uncompetitive vis-à-vis cheaper better quality imports from Scandinavia.
- Has sent staff on Chainsaw Operators Course at Pomeroy – staff have found them useful.
- Some awareness of Forest Service Research Branch among sawmill customers, but have had no call to use.

Stand-Alone Depth Interviews

POLITICIANS

Sub Category	No. of Interviews
Politicians	4

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Satisfaction with Contact with and Communication from DARD

- Contact with DARD tends to be at two distinct levels;
 - sending letters on behalf of Constituents
 - at a political level re policy
- Response time to written correspondence was considered to be prompt and satisfactory, with an acknowledgement in 2-3 days and a response in 3.5 weeks.
- The staff of the Minister and Permanent Secretary were all considered to be very “on the ball” and also they never gave the impression that they considered an issue to be trivial.
- The respondent was generally happy with the customer service they receive from DARD and had no problems with any staff across the board.
- Press releases were received from DARD on a daily basis and this information received was considered useful and timely.
- With regard to policy issues it was generally felt that DARD did its best to keep politicians well informed and usually imparted important information on either a personal basis or via the telephone. Contact was perceived to have improved over the last few years and had become more proactive.
- A view was expressed that perhaps DARD could conduct more briefings particularly with regard to de-coupling.
- Some would like to have more contact with higher levels in DARD and to have more contact between DARD’s policy team and other bodies such as UFU, NIAPA and politicians. There is a belief that this contact has broken down since the assembly has been suspended.
- A perceived negative of the Department was that it was too big and bureaucratic especially for a shrinking industry. Perceived areas of inefficiency include the number

of forms that farmers had to fill out and there was a view that these could be reduced and a degree of duplication avoided thus making life easier for the farmer and reducing inefficiencies and bureaucracy within DARD. Some appreciate that DARD have their hands tied by European legislation regarding the distribution of grants. The feeling is that there must be an improved system of getting payments to projects that need it most and not have it swallowed up in bureaucracy.

- There is also some tension between farmers and inspectors. Many farmers feel that the inspector is out to get the farmer, and there is a reluctance among inspectors to admit they are wrong, even when they are. From a farmers' point of view there is no redress or compensation for the hassle caused when inspectors get things wrong. He believes that inspectors should work much more closely with farmers for the common good and for mutual benefit.

LOCAL/CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Sub Category	No. of Interviews
District Councils	4
Government bodies/agencies with which DARD has an SLA	1

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

COUNCIL #1

- This Council had very little direct personal contact with DARD. Most contact is through responses to public consultation documents.
- There are a large number of consultation documents sent to Council from all central government departments. There is a lot of work involved in reading the documents and submitting a response so the Council have to be selective as to which ones they reply to. Some they receive from DARD are not relevant so they do not respond to all consultative documents from the department.
- The respondent feels that there is very little *meaningful* contact between DARD and the Council. They send consultation documents out all the time, but this is not regarded as meaningful. He feels the council is kept at "arm's length", but would rather have a much closer relationship. He feels there needs to be more discussions between DARD and the Council and more understanding of what each other is doing (and especially those actions which directly affect the area).
- Another issue is that the respondent believes that DARD should be taking a much clearer lead on rural development issues and should be much more proactive in this area. He believes that DARD need to come out to Councils and discuss their plans for rural development with them and see how the two bodies can work together to move things forward and to have a more co-ordinated approach to rural issues. He believes at the moment that there is no "joined up" government and that departments and agencies (e.g. Planning Service) need to work more closely together. He strongly believes that as DARD has responsibility for rural development issues the lead on this initiative should come from them. He feels that there might be a perception in DARD that his Council is seen as an urban borough, but there is in reality a sizeable rural population.
- The respondent believes that RCN and RDC are much more proactive and widely consult with councils and provide them with valuable information as to what is happening in the rural community at large.
- The feeling is that DARD should consult more widely with District Councils, especially regarding rural development issues and should keep the Councils more informed of what is happening in the wider rural community.

- What is needed is a lead agency for rural development, and as this currently falls under DARD's control, he feels it should be them. There is a need for this agency to bring district councils and others into the loop and to focus on more joined-up government. At the moment, he feels that there a number of departments which control different and diverse issues relating to rural development issues (e.g. DRD, DCAL), but that there is no one overall body co-ordinating the whole area. He feels there is a much greater need for co-ordination and that as DARD are currently the lead agency for rural development then it should be their responsibility for bringing everything together.

COUNCIL #2

- The Council as a whole has some dealings with DARD. This is mostly through submitting responses to consultation documents which the Department send out. There are a number of Policy Consultation Documents from DARD to which the Council is asked to submit a response. There are a number of residents in the area who would be affected by DARD policies, so the council do tend to take responses to consultation documents seriously.
- The bulk of correspondence with DARD is done in a formal way via official letter or formal response to consultation documents.
- It is felt that there is a general malaise throughout the public sector in terms of consultation. The belief is that any response provided by the Council does not seem to be taken cognisance of when it comes to the preparation of the final document. The feeling is that interim decisions have already been made by central government departments in advance of any consultation. Response to consultation documents is slow, but the respondent did feel that this response time had noticeably improved when Brid Rogers was minister. The point was made that this was not just particular to DARD, but common across all central government departments.
- The respondent felt that DARD was as good as any other central government department at answering specific queries or dealing with specific issues.
- The major issue was that the respondent did not feel that Council responses to consultation documents were being adequately taken cognisance of, and that the views of people being directly or indirectly affected by policies are not being given the credence they should be. There are rural issues which affect councillors and the wider community and it is not felt these views are listened to enough.
- What the respondent feels is required is a real champion for rural issues to help councils who are widely affected by these issues to move forward into the next century. At the moment, the belief is that only lip service is paid to the views of the Council.

- The respondent believes that there must be a change in the mindset of central government departments and the wider civil service, especially regarding their consultation process. The respondent believes central government departments need to adopt a more innovative approach and interact much more with the community and listen more to what they have to say. He believes that departments need to be more innovative and need to go out and consult with people on the ground. Central government is not seen to do this, but people expect to be consulted, especially when there are policies with specific implications for them. If this greater public consultation was seen to be happening it would go some way to appeasing people and show that the Department is interested in the views of a wide range of individuals.
- The respondent believes this is not a major change of emphasis, rather a change of tone and direction.

COUNCIL #3

- On a personal basis DARD staff were found to be helpful, personable and easy to get on with. However, he did find them stifled by policy decisions and red tape. He finds they have limited flexibility in responding to needs but realises their hands are tied and they are confined to a large extent by various laws and statutes.
- Can find it frustrating in getting money for various initiatives from DARD. They have timeframes on applications for projects, but the guidelines were late in coming out from the Department which meant not all available moneys could be accessed because it was too late.
- The respondent has noticed a high degree of conflict between DARD and the Planning Service. He feels there needs to be closer working between the two bodies so policy frameworks are complimentary and more cohesive and that they work together rather than at odds with each other.
- The Council also provides responses to selected consultation documents issued by DARD. It is important for councillors to respond to many of these as they have direct or indirect relevance to them or their constituents. His belief is that all district councils are contacted for consultation whether or not it is relevant to them all. He would prefer a smaller group of relevant councils (depending on the issue) be consulted so that there is a higher quality of more relevant responses from a smaller group, rather than sending the consultation document to all district councils.
- The respondent believes that culturally DARD could be more focussed on customer needs rather than on policy frameworks and procedures.

COUNCIL #4

Impressions/Dealings with DARD

- Works closely with Rural Development Council, Field Operatives at Dundonald House
- Deals with Cookstown – Lloyd St – Rural Economy reports are of World Standard – Best of Breed.
- Newforge has world class scientists but these are held in reserve to an extent because the scientists are not talking to non professional farmers, they think their remit is just farmers but they could target others as an audience.
- Communicates with DARD from Chief Exec level, attends seminars etc, Website, Dundonald House, Telephone at staff officer level (would not use DARD's standard no).
- Loughry is a model of co-operation between industry and education, but less knowledge of Greenmount and Enniskillen.

Problems with DARD

- Admin system at Headquarters - Dundonald House or on the phone 'no lateral thinking' - there is so much they 'can't do'. Need to understand the structure so that they can ask for the branch by name.
- DARD is not seen as being sharp in declaring what they do e.g. Top table/Annual Business Plan.
- Not proactive because too many people are dictating what DARD should do e.g., UFU, EU
- The Agricultural Census does not plug into other departments. There is also a lack of understanding or detail about that is available regarding the Census in Dundonald House.

Improvements

- Recognises that agriculture makes a big contribution to the NI economy 'Our livelihood is tied up in agriculture so policy changes are wide reaching'. So, DARD should focus on strengths such as food manufacture and our natural network. Acknowledges that some farmers are 'screwing the system'. NI needs to increase its Gross Value Added.
- DARD should look at other models from other parts of Europe e.g. Denmark (pigs) and Holland (diary) for added value products.
- Should encourage more economically beneficial opportunities such as farm enterprises like B&B hospitality training, farmers' markets, recreation or leisure provision in a countryside environment, tele-cottaging.
- Sense that if you are not a UFU member 'you are out of the loop'. Need to generate regular seminars and interest outside of the farming community. Would need an urban hotline into DARD so that DARD would be seen more for NI not just farmers.
- Website is not open about the branch structure – there should be a way to find out who is responsible. It should also have documents available in native adobe acrobat format. Presentations should be available and there should be links as well as a FAQ section for those that are not farmers.

- DARD should have an enquiry line with staff that are knowledgeable, have a problem solving attitude.
- Email addresses with people's names should be available – not department names 'needs to be a people department'
- Although he uses the Gov. info service NICS, he has rarely seen DARD press releases on it.
- Cannot subscribe to e-zines, don't get information unless asked for. Would prefer Diary system like Invest NI which puts you on the register.
- DARD could hold talks like the Innovation Series run by First Trust at Queens.
- Forms are hard to fill out and cumbersome.
- Need to inform economic development officers about what the colleges do from an economic perspective (all other non-DARD colleges do this).
- Feeling that the criteria were too strong for Peace 11 and it focused more on community issues rather than countryside issues.
- Would like to know the bottom line of the economic benefits of Countryside Management. Wants DARD to demonstrate how NI as a whole gets value for money, not just farmers.

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AGENCY

Impressions/Dealings with DARD

- Deals with Waterways (has staff on loan from DARD), Rivers, Science Service, Rural Development, Natural Reserve Rural Tourism and Countryside Management. Normally has personal contact, reads press releases or has staff on loan from DARD. The main means of contact is via telephone and public meetings. Contact is on a weekly to monthly basis with Rivers and Science Service.
- DARD has generally quite a good interface with its customers. Very satisfied with Science Service, Rivers Agency and Countryside Management (although the latter not at an operational level).
- Engaged in higher level debate on land drainage versus value – fisheries.
- DARD is seen as very good at accessing EU funding.
- Perception that DARD has not changed much. The colleges were not viewed very highly in the past but now feels that courses have changed to be more applicable to industry and less focused on academic research (fewer papers are published).
- The inspections process needs to have an advisory element as well as checking the rogue element.

Improvements

- Very concerned with Farm Pollution/Eutrophication (knows DARD is tackling already)– nutrients from farmers fertilising fields are affecting water sources. The Department for the Environment has overall responsibility for Pollution and Water Control, but since Agriculture is the source of the pollution, these 2 departments need to work on improving the quality. This should now be a top priority for DARD's Countryside Management team.
- Issues should be discussed at an earlier level e.g. Nitrates Directive.

- Staff are professional and knowledgeable but sometimes set in their ways and not as open to change and they could be. With Rivers Agency – has more contact with staff at higher levels on policy matters. They are fairly responsive but sometimes slow to get an answer.
- Sometimes DCAL feels left out so there is a need to forge more formal links, e.g., need stronger input for protection of fisheries. Would like the opportunity to be more involved in working groups – has been left out of these in the past.
- Criticism of Rural Development and how long it took to develop PEACE 11-imagines the frustration of the public.
- Has a general level of awareness of DARD but would like to be better informed e.g. Countryside Management.
- Would like to be actively engaged in developing policies where applicable.
- Like many Gov. departments DARD has a tendency to work in isolation. Now there is more interdepartmental work than before so DARD should take this example by increasing information provision. A knowledge network has been developed across the Civil Service which is accessible by officers in the Civil Service – not sure if DARD has embraced this yet but if not they should.
- Views on the Rural Development Programme are positive because offices are located out in the community and there are good contacts with community groups. However, this stretches manpower. Another negative is that the process is complex which is mostly due to EU regulations.
- DARD's AGRI Environment Services/Schemes were seen as going the right way to introduce more environmental awareness but fisheries still have to improve.
- There are issues surrounding the previous splitting of DARD and DCAL so that DCAL does not have direct access to the Science Service because it is still part of DARD. DCAL's work is totally dependent on the Science Service's work so that it is more than a research contract. If DCAL were having an assembly committee, they would have to call on the scientists for their expertise. Feels that they shouldn't have been split because there are now inefficiencies and confusion in the public. It can also be difficult to collate information. There are also concerns about future fragmentation.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

Sub Category	No. of Interviews
UFU	1
NIAPA	1
NIMEA	1
Breed Societies	2
YFCU	1
RSPB	1
UWT	1
Other Environmental Groups	3

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES - INTERVIEW #1

Impressions/Dealings with DARD

- Deals on a no. of levels – from top of organisation down – regular minister/permanent secretary – policy and delivery – staff right down organisation.
- Very few occasions not granted contact.
- Policy at top level – pretty receptive/fairly open. Moving down organisation to middle management – tighter and there is more of a ‘can’t do’ attitude – less openness and transparency in dealing making process, e.g., senior level discussions – tagging of cattle. Bottom – know practicalities. But middle – who makes decision little knowledge but just take top level policies - Letter not spirit of law.
- Use college facilities and members go to the colleges. Colleges play a key role in developing new techniques e.g., sexing semen and can take the hit rather than industry suffering if a new technique doesn’t work.
- Use Agricultural Census for yield figures, weather aid.
- Although DARD is seen as changing, the speed of change is not satisfactory *‘dragged along kicking and screaming’*.

Why this problem?

- Civil Service mentality (government requirements/tax payers money).
- Middle management has more pressure (public accounts/audit commission). *‘Can’t be blamed for doing anything wrong if don’t do anything’*. There is no risk taking at that level – could affect career.
- Admin level -More interface with customer i.e., farmer. Very aware of practical problems but not as aware of bigger picture e.g., how identify sheep. Paint unsatisfactory because of health so there were discussions of Gold plated system – tag ear. Could be ideal but is in essence impractical and expensive to implement.

Problems

- Particular problems with telephone access to Dundonald House. There is one central line then you are diverted. It's again a problem of knowledge at an admin level. In other offices, they get straight through.

Improvements

- To bring together – great blue yonder/practical resolution.
- Sometimes the UFU office Brussels – own sources – picks up info – even before DARD.
- Although know agriculture centred aspects very well, doesn't know – internal workings and does not feel well enough informed about other aspects.
- Need more openness/transparency e.g., re. colleges – very supportive of them – do good job but would like more constructive criticism especially regarding budget.
- Like all Government departments DARD needs to be more open and transparent re budgetary area – any other business has to.
- Need to be open about how DARD manages funds outside its own funds e.g. dishing out EU funds and Rural Development funding.
- Complicated admin process e.g., application for Agricultural Census in NI to ROI, much easier to fill out in ROI. Also arable scheme paid once a year in NI at then end of the period, but in ROI it is out to farmers 2 days after the opening date. Rural Development application form too long at 52 pages.
- Customer focus - DARD needs to focus on what their customer is, management issue, the concept of customer has changed in the last few years e.g., internal customers which you provide a service for and an element of customers includes taxpayers.
- Under pressure to give even weighting and making an effort to be seen to be even handed, so sometimes do not award necessary attention to bigger players e.g., UFU treated same as NIAPA. *'Should try to be more in tandem with major customers rather than distant'.*
- Need to find practical solutions to problems e.g. identification of Health problems such as TB – this should be dealt with straight away.
- Economic factors have been let drift – could have been more proactive in maintaining industry e.g. work on potato seed (the export market was taken over by Holland but the Eat/Wear market could be developed such as adding value to crisps and chips. At the moment, DARD are not doing anything in this respect.
- Rural Development programme – DARD – Monitoring Body – 4 year programme and 2 years in before schemes were put together. Now pressure to spend so UFU worried this will impact on quality. Problems with how DARD managed the process re. Time delay, bureaucracy and mixed messages (i.e. who was eligible/not). Lessons to be learned next time - no time delay. Also, took too long to get Focus Farms in place.
- Lack of clarity surrounding Inspections process - is it to check up on farmers like a policeman or to catch out fraudulent farmers or to act as an advisor or helper to assist the farmer? If it is to police, this can cause problems with unannounced visits e.g. bio security (possible transmission of disease).

- Website needs more statistical info, public reports and press releases. Like the org, you need to know the structure to be able to navigate the Website. Needs to be updated more regularly.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES - INTERVIEW #2

- Contact with DARD on daily basis – at all levels. All sections (Dundonald House) and Orchard House.
- Find out about activities through letters, email, posters, press releases from DARD.
- Know DARD very well, know who to contact in every situation.
- Familiar with logo.
- Re Policy – speak to Tony McCusker or Norman Fulton, Grants and Subsidies – Briege Glendinning, Inspection – Wallace McQuirter.
- DARD Website – info use only on Peace and EU developments. Free PC provided by DARD for farmers to access rural portal.
- Attend local offices – Cookstown, Magherafelt, Coleraine and Omagh. Opening hours not accessible to farmers. Décor is awful. Magherafelt has portacabins, locked doors not welcoming, very formal. Key improvement would be to open Saturday morning or a late evening during the week.
- No difficulties with DARD personally, build up trust. Different attitude for 'Joe Public'.
- Email contact with 'higher levels' within DARD.
- Overall satisfied, work well with DARD.
- Stakeholder groups set up – NIAPA input questionable 'you are there to blame things on'. Attend out of politeness – but listened to?
- Problem – farmers calling Orchard House – get recorded message, costing money. Poor service. On hold for average 10 minutes, is frustrating and impersonal.
- Info is clear and easy to understand for NIAPA (know all the jargon) but difficult for farmers – too much jargon.
- Awful waste of paper in DARD correspondence – loads of 'bumf'. DARD have to send by law but most is not applicable to them.
- DARD keeps NIAPA up to speed, response times are acceptable but could speed up – make decisions quicker. Indecisiveness – "x" is dealing with that'. Sits on supervisors desk, someone off on sick leave, no-one else can deal with.
- Complaints process poor. Appeals procedures a 'sham'. Panel does not study case sufficiently. Poor explanations - 'the balance of evidence went in favour of DARD'. Supposed to be independent.
- Discourages contact with DARD – no direct line. Staff turnover high and new staff generally lack knowledge of agri industry.
- No difference to other government departments (DOE, Planners, DHSS).
- Funding – ESA's, Livestocks, CMS – deal with on behalf of farmers. IACS is long winded process, penalties for errors. Very stressful for all involved.
- Peace II – slow process but improving. NIAPA call direct as farmer goes through long chain. Unfair on person on the ground.
- Form filling – need to be professional form fillers. Farmers trust NIAPA as they don't know what form means. Payment is BACS for farmers usually.

- Inspection – process checks are fair. Question how they are carried out in time. Need full knowledge and co-operation of farmer.
- Education – Jim Carmichael teaches ‘good business sense’ courses and IT. Involved in consultation.
- Rural Development – involved with RDC and RCN. Main stream farming should be part and parcel of RD.
- Rural Connect – work with Peace II. Fine. Co-operative.
- Veterinary Service – regular contact. Accessibility during working hours could be improved. Variation in Vet office throughout province – wonder if all work to same policy. Some more relaxed, a more sensible attitude.
- Science Service – no problems.
- Policy – DARD need to listen more. Increased effort with farmers needed, provide more info.
- DARD is a disjointed organisation – all separate departments. “All working within own wee kingdom.”
- Economics & Statistics – Sheila Magee (Newforge) is very good, very impressive – ‘really into numbers’. Also Mark McClean (CAP reform).

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES - INTERVIEW #3

- The respondent has noticed a clear decrease in professional ability in DARD in the last 10 years. He believes that when staff build up a certain level of professionalism they move on and the relationship they had with them has to be built up with others from scratch, something which he finds very frustrating.
- In addition the respondent has noticed an increasing shortage of practical understanding. He believes that staff know what the book says, but their practical implementation and ability to translate this to practical, everyday working is weak.
- He has found that service levels can vary throughout the organisation. Some areas would score highly where there are those who have a personal desire to see things functioning well. In other areas he believes that a “civil service attitude” persists of doing only what needs to be done. This is a common perception among the industry. The respondent feels that there needs to be an attitude change and that staff have to realise they are not just civil servants but have to have high customer care levels too.
- This respondent believes that DARD have become better in the last year at seeking stakeholder views before sitting down and formulating policy. He has been invited for conversations and consultation on how the industry sees various things and to discuss various issues. He appreciates this greater consultation and realises DARD are moving in the right direction where this is concerned.

- His main points were that the staff training within DARD has to focus more on the commercial side and to the fact that they have customers who should be their priority. They must be more commercially orientated and not just seen as civil servants. This customer focus would do a lot for DARD itself in its internal functioning and would build up more respect in that there is a government department that is not just dedicated to doing a civil service job, but is working for the good of the industry and economy.
- He believes that DARD's emphasis should be on developing an increased customer focus in its widest context. This he believes is the one thing which would transform DARD's image among a lot of people.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES - INTERVIEW #4

- The respondent has some particular issues with DARD. He believes that the Department seems to make it as difficult as possible to move pedigree livestock in and out of Northern Ireland. He does not believe that DARD realise that people are operating in a commercial environment and trying to run businesses to make a profit. He feels that DARD, through strict enforcement and regulation, are making it difficult for breeders to operate commercially in this enforcement.
- Another issue is that he believes that DARD is slow at making decisions and communicating these decisions, especially compared to the Departments in the rest of GB.
- He believes that the DARD Press Office needs to include people who have worked in the media and should not just be manned by career Civil Servants. The Department needs to be more open and the public have a greater right to know what is going on. At the moment, he feels that the Department is reticent to give out information and reasons for particular decisions are not communicated clearly. He points to the fact that other government offices have ex-media personnel in place.
- He believes that DARD needs to exhibit greater business sense in that if they don't look after the client then they will have no business. They should deal with issues and problems as business people would deal with clients, and should have more business savvy and be more client-orientated.
- The main issues are that staff mean well but don't always deliver. There are nice people, but the system is not working and they do not offer prompt decisions or commercial savvy.
- Another point is that they don't adequately deal with people who break regulations and who threaten the income of hundreds of others. Such individuals who flout the regulations are not brought to book.
- He believes that DARD needs to have a more client focus. If they make regulations difficult and awkward and are not properly enforced, then he believes this is forcing honest men to be dishonest because of the system.
- A final point is that in lots of seemingly related government departments and agencies there is a lack of co-operation and co-ordination between them (e.g. Planning Service, Roads Service, Water Service, DARD) and this means that the actions and regulations of one department are often at odds with another.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES - INTERVIEW #5

- Dealings with DARD mainly in respect of animal health (inc. vet). Phone contact with Dundonald House is helpful – will point you in the right direction.
- Also farmers wife therefore dealings with DARD re farm.
- Deal with Head of Section if possible but not always possible in local offices – speak to deputy. Prefer to 'go to top' – greater authority to sort out problem.
- Fairly familiar with DARD logo.
- Telephone contact with DARD once a week – general queries about scraping and transmittable diseases.
- DARD divided into sections, well structured. Always contact person named on literature from DARD.
- Also postal contact (once a month) – generally happy, no problems.
- Don't have PC at home.
- Local offices have improved – more helpful and more staff on counter, appearance and location both fine but décor could do with an update.
- Overall satisfaction is good. All info presented in a clear and easily understandable way with explanations given. Personal level on farm feel that farmers are too heavily penalised for genuine mistakes (e.g. records when tagging mixing up gender and tag no.).
- Well informed about DARD services – speedy responses, staff 8/10.
- Nothing prevents contact with DARD – feel can go to DARD on any query. If the individual doesn't know the answer they'll revert back within a reasonable period of time.
- No contact with other govt agencies.
- Service improvement largely down to better opening hours, quicker response times, more helpful.
- No grants/subsidies or inspection process involvement.
- Re education and training – limited. Suffolk Sheep Society involved with Greenmount in project 2000-2004 re Suffolk rams. Invited to prize days. Courses advertised through newspaper. No further knowledge – agri well served in courses now preparing students well for industry.
- Rural Development – no involvement.
- No awareness of Rural Connect.
- Aware of rural portal Website from correspondence from DARD – 'this info can also be found on our Website...'.
'.
- Agri-env. – aware but no involvement. Read in press or become aware through chatting to friends. Doesn't know enough to comment.
- No involvement in groups.

- Veterinary Service – since foot and mouth contact just once a year when have premier sale. Lot more rules and regulations to follow from department. Lack common sense when lay down rules. Increase standard for expert status. Balmoral showgrounds very clean. Vet service very indecisive re whether have sale or not. Contact with Veterinary Service mainly telephone. All paperwork posted. Well informed, but there is always room for improvement. Veterinary Service changed in terms of courtesy and helpfulness – now much better, Ms Rodgers influence? Clear and accurate info received, opening hours fine.
- Seek views of industry very important by letter to branch, always reply, very useful.
- Personal level (re farm) – standstill period for sheep is poor. Reduced from 21 days to 6 days not satisfactory, v. difficult. When complain DARD states ways to get round it, but shouldn't do (won't put on paper). Farmers livelihood greatly affected when can't move stock for long periods.
- No involvement with science service.
- No contact with policy.
- Overall views – bring back DARD field officers (have been cut back too much). This would offer a much better service – more useful, helpful. Talked to farmers and advised on funding. Info in press can be easily missed.
- Economics & Statistics – son fills in re farm. Doesn't know much else. No interest in results. Sometimes in newspaper, don't mean much (not easily understandable).

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES - INTERVIEW #6

Impressions/Dealings with DARD

- The YFCU is the informal extension to DARD's formal education and DARD funds it. They use the training facilities in the colleges.
- Has a relationship with senior officers in DARD with both personal and formal contact.
- Deals with funding, colleges and policy. The colleges are keen to have the YFCU involved – not wanting to be seen as 'Ivory Towers'. Use the colleges for country meetings and training, lend equipment. Sometimes take courses, e.g. at Loughry – Food Hygiene.
- Would be pushing it to demand that DARD came to them but can have face to face meetings if someone from DARD is already calling out to the UFU.
- Sense that DARD is being pulled from many different places. Although they did have a review, there is some cynicism as to how the recommendations of the consultants could be built in. *'The DARD guys are as clued in as other departments but they are all politically tied'.*

Improvements to DARD

- Filling out the application form for BSP was difficult - much larger accounts were much less intensive with a 10-min interview on the phone.
- Sometimes they feel a bit left out of things because they are not one of the major players.

- It is difficult to get through the door in Dundonald House because there are lots of forms to fill in and it is hard to get your car parked. Likened to a hen house.
- DARD is a '*big machine which is difficult to know*'. You need to know the person to ask the question to. You learn the structure by talking to people and observing but this can be difficult for a '*wee farmer*'. When new people come into senior positions, it is hard and takes time to build up a relationship again. This is especially difficult for young people who have to prove themselves even though they are very well qualified and many have PhDs.
- Uses the Website to pull off policy stuff '*use it to nosy and see what's going on*'. Should have more of a local emphasis rather than Central Government Websites such as those in England and Wales. Finds that it is difficult to get back to the homepage when on another page.
- Sense that DARD is changing but not as fast as some would like, so it is not so much the direction of change but the speed of change. There have been some great ideas, which arouse excitement, but then there can be a 2-year delay in actually implementing these ideas which is frustrating. DARD needs to drive entrepreneurship and tone down on bureaucracy.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES - INTERVIEW #7

Impressions/Dealings with DARD

- Key contact with Forest/Rivers Agency/Fisheries/Countryside management. In recent years have developed a unique relationship with countryside management where 1 member of staff is 'agriculture environmental officer' and spends half their time in RSPB and DARD.
- Mainly has personal contacts in DARD and prefers to deal on phone/e-mails. If more formal – letter. Contact with local offices is good. Dundonald House '*horrible place, so impersonal. It's like Eastern Europe, a tiny little cellular room*'. The annexes, e.g. Countryside Management are seen as more pleasant.
- DARD – seems much better resourced than DOE for e.g. who don't have staff on ground.
- Commends Rural stakeholders group – set up by department – environment, wildlife, UFU, processors.
- Very close relationship with staff in colleges e.g., in Enniskillen - good because input to courses. In Enniskillen - school groups – local area - Wetlands walking. Government. Also Greenmount– talk to RSPB – has lectured on environmental awareness which injects into other courses as well.
- Little contact Vet Service unless there is some legal aspect where they need to get labs, police involved for analysis. Don't use often but when do speed of response very good.

Changes – DARD

- Changed enormously from when first started with RSPB (13 years ago) - battle is coming to end. Due to EU imperatives and pressure groups – DARD acted (ROI didn't). E.g. RSPB lost out when old Drainage scheme – River Blackwater – birds vanished and fisheries. Then Drainage changed to Watercourse Management – Rivers and a staff member from RSPB was seconded. Countryside management – was expanding – environment sensitive areas – more environmental oriented staff.
- Forest service – had been in conflict 1993 – but then implemented policy – area improved. Fisheries didn't change – but now there is a glimmer of hope. The no of staff changed, e.g., countryside management – influx staff.

Problems with DARD

- Since they are a Campaigning organisation promoting environmentally friendly practices among Government departments, they are often at 'cross swords' with Agriculture Policy.
- Areas of little change – fisheries – attitudes personnel who do not see their role as meeting bio-diversity obligations.
- Like a stonewall - when DARD changes personnel/something happens e.g., Strangford Lough or risk of infraction.
- Hands tied – EU – works at EU level to change environmental policy.
- Rivers Agency – lost staff and some left but they were not replaced (1 conservationist).
- DARD has managed bird Monitoring Agriculture Environment Schemes for a few years. Seen as good schemes but no monitoring.
- Rural Development - Used to be better -Little knowledge – rural stakeholders – have an interest there. No awareness of rural connect/rural NI.

Improvements

- Relationship with Rural Development could be more fruitful – but didn't have capacity would like to engage more but no staff time.
- Priority for farmland birds.
- Impression that Website looks good but no information there. Need to update and keep census documents on. Use DOE Website a lot.
- Would like to receive information by post – e.g., recent census documents, info on Agriculture environmental schemes, Minutes of meetings (and e-mail).
- Would want information on other services available – the best way to receive this would be for contacts they already have to send relative information.
- DARD might get involved with Hillfarm – Glenpurdy – RSPB and DOE – big research programme.
- Agricultural Environment - Countryside management – on paper very good but problems transferring to ground. When first involved – saw huge potential to slow down rate of destruction. Positive – focused towards priority species. Negative – 'broad brush' – had to do something – helpful/easy to do and cost effective. Need to be more flexible to different farmers and work towards – level expertise DARD advisors.

- CAP – big impact on birds. Next big challenge – to put back what was lost. Restoration element to scheme. Money to farmers involved.
- Uses Agriculture Census to keep close eye on statistics – particularly interested in arable land and the related decline in farmland birds, no. of animals grazing, stocking levels, Land use – grass, crops, hay, silage, Money spent on chemical fertiliser.. Went along to DARD to get statistics - difficult because gaps in data – difficulties in way data collected.
- Member of Area based committees:
Lough Neagh]
Strangford Lough] advise government
Lough Erne]
Issues raised – related to DARD so it would be good to have staff member of DARD to note concerns and take back.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES - INTERVIEW #8

- The respondent has noticed a cultural change in DARD from having the aim of putting as much money into the farmer's pocket as possible and producing as much as possible to moving to managing the countryside more effectively and taking more cognisance of environmental issues. He realises this will be a slow process but it is starting to happen.
- This individual is much happier with the service provided by DARD now than previously. He believes they have closer relationships with those high up in DARD.
- However, he is still unhappy with their attitudes to environmental issues and the fact that things are still driven by an agricultural agenda rather than from an environmental agenda.
- The major improvement has been the integration of agriculture with the environment and environmental issues. He believes these do need to come together and work closely (such as DEFRA in GB).
- He feels that DARD is a huge, leviathan organisation and that there is a feeling of "are we doing things right?", when the real question should be "are we doing the right things?"
- He believes that the scope is there in Northern Ireland to capitalise on its position. He believes there is no reason why Northern Ireland should not focus on "green" farming (e.g. the fact that produce is GM free) and go for niche markets and sell and compete on that basis. DARD should emphasise the differences which farming in Northern Ireland can bring and not try and sell to the same markets as everyone else. To make this fundamental change does he believes require vision and it is up to DARD to adopt a forward thinking approach such as this and show some vision.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES - INTERVIEW #9

- This respondent believes that DARD does not have its emphasis on the wider rural agenda. Among the wider rural communities, there is a frustration that DARD is seen as primarily the Department of Agriculture with a little bit of rural development on the side. He believes that while DARD should help the farming industry, they need much greater action to redress issues in rural areas, especially regarding the rural economy. At the moment he points to the fact that there are Rural Affairs Departments in Wales and Scotland, and believes that there needs to be a dedicated Department for Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland, or that DARD have to place more emphasis on rural development and wider rural issues. He believes that DARD is still primarily seen as the Department of Agriculture, but he highlights that the countryside has changed and that DARD has not evolved as quickly to meet this changing rural environment.
- He believes that there is no one dedicated Department within government in Northern Ireland with responsibility for rural communities. He highlights the fact that a number of government departments have a small responsibility, but no one department is co-ordinating the overall effort relating to rural communities. The respondent identifies that there are groups out there such as RDC, RCN and Countryside Alliance who articulate the concerns of the rural community but DARD is not in a position to deal with these issues. He believes that DARD should widen its focus and take a much more central and pragmatic role on wider rural issues and not just farming.
- The respondent believes that there is a genuine desire in DARD to do its best in the decision-making process. He believes that DARD have handled the CAP reform debate very well and demonstrated a commitment to proper consultation on this issue. He does, however, believe that DARD need to take a fundamental look at what it is delivering in rural areas and widen their rural agenda.
- He has happy with DARD's service in a number of areas (for example on the issue of CAP reform) and in the last decade he has also noticed a big change in the way they do business in that they are much more open, transparent and consult closely with major stakeholders. He believes in this respect DARD is a good example of modern government.
- He is however frustrated and disappointed that DARD's main focus still is on farming and that they have not yet "championed" the wider rural cause. He believes that the key issue is whether or not DARD is there to champion the rural cause and what their involvement is in rural issues. He would accept the argument that DARD is primarily the Department of Agriculture and focussed on farming and farmers' issues and is not equipped to deal with the wider rural agenda. If that is the view, then a dedicated Department is needed to deal with wider rural issues. He sees two distinct options: one that DARD change and broaden their outlook to focus on rural affairs; or that a new dedicated department is created (as in the rest of GB) to focus on rural affairs. The latter would be his preferred option.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES - INTERVIEW #10

- 5000 BASC members in NI.
- Involved in conservation activity – interaction with Agri-environment and farmers re: use of land. Many members also farmers.
- Dealings with DARD – papers on subjects sent, related to activities, well informed on strategy and impact.
- Irish Hare group – lead body is Ulster Wildlife Trust. DARD sit in on and contribute.
- Lack of cohesion between DARD and environment and heritage service – some overlap of interests.
- Doesn't know much about DARD. New to job. DARD could help by producing a guide to general topic areas.
- Very keen on web access but laborious if don't have broadband. Sets out clearly what DARD is about, points you in the right direction.
- Not familiar with DARD logo.
- Infrequent contact with DARD – overlap in public meetings and policy groups.
- Close relationship with DOE not DARD.
- Members have regular contact with DARD (farmers).
- Telephone contact with DARD in past been helpful but infrequent.
- Don't attend local offices.
- Customer service – Dundonald house – relaxed, helpful, pleasant. Perhaps more contact over time (new to position).
- Not sufficiently informed about DARD –doesn't know of services, fault on both sides.
- Comparison to DOE – DARD info more practical, impression that staff are very knowledgeable – at group meetings contribution from DARD excellent. Professional.
- No idea of opening hours.
- No grants/subsidies.
- No inspection.
- Education – aware in principle not in detail. Doesn't know about courses or if widely enough promoted.
- Branding in DARD not best use of resources. Don't need to promote themselves. Too much temptation today to spend on logos and image. Perceived not necessary in public sector.
- Rural development – rapidly changing area. Last 50 years govt. intervention in rural affairs. Urge govt support rural activity that is not agri based. Not familiar with RD programmes or Peace II. (know more re Scotland - only recently placed here).
- No knowledge of Rural Connect.
- No knowledge of rural NI Website – address details taken, will look up –interested.
- Agri-environment – principally aware – avail of grant funding, CMS and ESA. Limited experience. Schemes available of interest to members. BASC could promote more widely to members. Positive side – incentive to undertake activities of benefit to natural habitat and improvement. Negative side – why needed? Where going?
- Groups – member of institute of directors. Great networking forum. Director of BASC. Meeting once every 2 weeks. No DARD involvement. Issues – commercial strategies and implication of legislation.

- Veterinary Service – involved in survey. Debate – disease in pigs transferred by foxes. Ongoing. Also disposal of carcasses involvement. No enough experience in Veterinary side to comment.
- Science service – doesn't know except aware of Crossnacreevy.
- Policy – no direct policy issues with DARD, just DOE and Home Office. Kept in loop by DARD but to date not relevant (but this could easily change e.g. if another Foot and Mouth outbreak).
- Economics & Statistics – no participation in either. Not access results. Done in Scotland with Scottish Enterprise Borders but not involved as yet in NI.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE BODIES - INTERVIEW #11

- Has worked very closely with the Environmental Policy Division of DARD in the past, but not so much recently. This is a distinct division, but the individual believes it should be a cross-cutting theme throughout DARD.
- A lot of this organisation's work was directed at Ministerial level and they had a lot of time for Brid Rodgers.
- This organisation is primarily concerned about health scares, animal welfare scares, plus climate changes due to shipping food around the world.
- The individual believes other agencies such as DRD are much better than DARD in terms of communication. DARD also allow minimal opportunity for stakeholder dialogue and do not engage in any meaningful consultation.
- Any contact with DARD is by mail or e-mail or through the Rural Development Forum.
- DARD is not used to having a lobby and is therefore more sensitive to criticism. Other agencies such as DRD and DOE are more used to dealing with activists.
- There is still a strong feeling that DARD are not concerned with wider aspects of Rural Development but are predominantly focussed on farming and act in their best interests often to the detriment of other agencies/bodies. The individual believes there needs to be a "huge cultural change" in DARD to protect the public and the environment, and it is well behind other Departments in this respect.
- The respondent does feel that DARD (compared to DEFRA) is much more sensitive to the needs of small farmers.

Glossary of Terms

ANIFPO	Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation Ltd
APP	Agriculture Primary Producers
APHIS	Animal and Public Health Information System
AVI	Authorised Veterinary Inspector
CAFRE	College of Food Agriculture and Rural Development
CATI	Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing
CMS	Countryside Management Scheme
ESA	Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme
FWPS	Farm Woodland Premium Scheme
NIFPO	Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation Ltd
PVP	Private Veterinary Practitioner
WGS	Woodland Grant Scheme