



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Secretary

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Senator Chris Back
Chair
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Back

I am writing to correct my testimony of 4 June 2015.

In response to questions from Senator Dastyari about the budget night drinks hosted by the Foreign Minister I said that we would take the question on notice. I also said there were no DFAT officers present in support roles.

I have since been informed that this is not correct. Four DFAT graduates from the 2014 intake were involved in assisting with the function. Their duties included escorting Heads of Mission to and from the function, serving food and drinks and assisting with the clean up.

The four graduates were volunteers who had responded to an invitation from the Director of the Graduate Program to indicate whether they would be interested in carrying out these functions. It was considered by the Department to be an opportunity for the volunteers to get exposure to the Foreign Minister's office, to interact with senior diplomats and Australian guests and to observe a networking format which is the staple of diplomatic work abroad.

The costs of the function were met by the Foreign Minister. The four graduates were considered to be on duty. No overtime payments were made.

I regret that when I gave my response on 4 June I was not aware of this departmental involvement. I hope you will accept it was an honest mistake.

I am copying this letter to Senator Dastyari.

Yours sincerely

Peter N Varghese AO