Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

QoN 001 – 07 July 2021
Topic: Inquiry into funding for public research into foreign policy issues

Senator Kimberley Kitching

Question

Mr Stanier: I think I can answer the question. We have four formal levels of proficiency. Level 4 is for native speakers, so it's very hard to reach that level unless you are a native speaker. Level 3 is the proficiency that we bring people up to before they go on posting. That's a higher level of proficiency. The way I would describe that is that, if you speak at level 3 proficiency, you have the capacity to conduct quite a technical meeting, perhaps on a technical issue like climate change or arms control. That's quite a high level of proficiency. I'm not quite sure whether the 92 people that I referred to are at that level 3 proficiency, but I can find that out for you if you like.

CHAIR: That would be great. Thank you.

Answer

Of the 92 DFAT staff with a formally tested current proficiency in Mandarin as of May 2021, 45 were at Level 3 and 47 at Level 4.

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

007 – 12 July 2021
Topic: Foreign policy research and foreign interference

Senator Kimberley Kitching

Question

How can foreign policy research be used to shed light on foreign interference?

Answer

DFAT seeks to enhance official and public understanding of Australian foreign policy in a range of ways. Foreign policy research can enhance understanding of issues such as overt foreign influence and covert interference and is one of the tools that can inform DFAT's policy development and broader public understanding of the issues.

DFAT collaborates with a range of non-government organisations through the provision of grants and sharing of informationto progress their work in counter foreign interference-related activities, including research on malign information, civic architecture, and methods to support combatting online manipulation.