

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Additional Estimates Hearings February 2016

Communications Portfolio

Department of Communications and the Arts

Question No: 74

Department of Communications and the Arts

Hansard Ref: Written, 19/02/2016

Topic: Ministerial Fund

Senator Bilyk, Catryna asked:

1. Assessors – Ms Basser told the Senate inquiry that, in November, there were over 300 people on the “independent register for assessors.” That seems a remarkably high number.
 - (a) How many are on the register now?
 - (b) How many applications have been received to be assessors?
 - (c) How many have been appointed?
 - (d) How many rejected?
 - (e) What have been the grounds for rejection?
2. How many assessors have been called upon to conduct assessments?
 - (a) How many have undertaken two or more assessments?
3. In the assessment process, what has been the composition of the assessment panels?
 - (a) How many have had one or more independent assessors?
 - (b) How many have had Ministry officers?
 - (c) How many have had DFAT officers?
4. Priority regions – I note that on the website priority countries have been identified
 - China
 - Germany
 - India
 - Singapore
5. These are apparently on the basis that cultural agreements have been signed with these countries. This seems to be a circular argument – the government has decided that these are priority countries, therefore they are priority countries. How was it decided that cultural agreements should be signed with these countries?
 - (a) What advice did the Arts Ministry provide in relation to that decision?
6. No priority regions within Australia have been identified. Ms Basser told the Senate Committee that the list of priority regions would be “Absolutely” available on the website. When will that be?
 - (a) Speaking hypothetically, as a small arts organisation in Southern Tasmania, how would I know if I am in a priority region?

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- (b) How would I know if I am totally wasting my time in applying, because Southern Tasmania is not a priority?
7. What mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that the ministerial fund and the Australia Council's grants processes are complementary and do not duplicate functions or overlook areas of need?

Answer:

1.
 - (a) There are 366 people on the register.
 - (b) 393 expressions of interest have been received.
 - (c) Refer to answer at (a)
 - (d) 1 person has been declined registration.
 - (e) The declined person's application did not align with the intent of the Catalyst program.
2. 50 assessors have been called upon to conduct assessments.
 - (a) At this time 30 assessors have undertaken two or more assessments.
3. Applications are assessed by at least three assessors, including a combination of independent and Government assessors.
 - (a) Each eligible application is assessed by two or more independent assessors.
 - (b) Each eligible application is assessed by at least one Departmental officer.
 - (c) At this time 28 applications have been assessed by DFAT officers.
4. That is correct.
5.
 - (a) *An Agreement on Cultural Co-operation between the Government of Australia and the Government of the People's Republic of China* was signed in 1981. To renew their commitment to the agreement and facilitate engagement for individual artists and arts organisations, Australia and China periodically agree an updated implementation plan (currently every three years).

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An Agreement between the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of Australia on Cultural Cooperation was signed in 1997. The parties refreshed their commitment to this in the *Berlin-Canberra Declaration of Intent on a Strategic Partnership* signed in 2013. In 2014 an Australia-Germany Advisory Group was established to examine ways to build closer ties between the two countries. Co-chaired by Finance Minister Senator the Hon Mathias Cormann and German Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office Professor Dr Maria Böhmer, the group comprised senior leaders from business, academia, and the arts. The final report of the group was released in November 2015. It proposed a number of ways to build on current platforms to take bilateral cultural exchange to the next level, including recommending that Germany be identified as a priority country under *Catalyst - The Australian Arts and Culture Fund*.

A Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Arts and Culture between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of Australia was signed in November 2014, to create a framework for deeper cultural exchanges. This agreement refers to, and furthers, previous cultural agreements signed in 1971 and 1993.

A Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Fields of Arts and Culture between the Government of Australia and the Government of the Republic of Singapore was signed in June 2015. This refers to, and furthers, the *Cultural Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the Republic of Singapore* signed in 1975.

Decisions to sign the cultural agreements listed above were made by the Governments of the time based on broad ranging priorities.

- (b) In relation to the most recent agreements, the Ministry for the Arts provided advice on the anticipated benefits of the agreements for individual artists, organisations and institutions, and the Australian arts and cultural sector as a whole. The Ministry for the Arts negotiated the text with its international governmental counterpart.
- 6.
- (a) Priority regions will be listed on the website as they are identified. “Priority regions” refers to international regions, e.g. Europe, Asia or the Pacific. No priority regions for the Catalyst Fund have been identified to date.
- (b) As they are identified, priority regions will be communicated via the *Catalyst* website.

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The Catalyst guidelines state: “Applications are welcome for outbound international activities in any country and region of the world, and inbound collaborative activities with international partners. From time to time, priority countries or overseas regions will be announced on the Ministry’s website. International arts and cultural engagement and two-way artistic exchanges with these countries are particularly encouraged.”

7. The Australia Council’s programmes emphasise artistic excellence and include funding for core operations, individual artists, international market development, awards, fellowships and residencies. Catalyst emphasises project funding for small to medium organisations and regional areas, encourages innovation and participation across Australia, supports cultural diplomacy, and promotes partnerships and the leveraging of private sector support.

Government assessors check for duplication.

Recommendations for funding are informed by consideration of factors including balance across art forms and types of activity, geographic and community diversity, and particular sector needs.