

The Corporate Services Division

provides administrative and operational support to the Australia Council and its staff.

The Australia Council is responsible for its own administration, subject to the *Australia Council Act 1975* and requirements applying generally to statutory authorities.

The Division is responsible for the development and administration of an efficient system of financial planning and control, the fair and effective management of human resources, information technology, and the accounts, records and physical resources of the Australia Council.

FINANCE AND SERVICES

Finance and Services provides advice to Council on financial policy and procedures and the optimal use of its financial and physical resources. It comprises two major areas: Finance and Central Records.

Finance

The Australia Council's main source of funds is its annual appropriation from the Commonwealth Government, as advised in the Budget, and covers both support for the arts and administration. The Council's secondary source of funds is from miscellaneous income – returned funds from prior year grants, interest earnings, proceeds of sale of publications, and special purposes grants. These totalled \$1.9 million in 1996-97. All miscellaneous income (excluding interest earned) is returned to the relevant Board, Fund or Division. Interest revenue is allocated by Council as it sees fit.

1996-97 was the second year of the Council's rolling triennial funding arrangements. These

arrangements enable the Council to operate in an atmosphere of stability and predictability, and to make continuing commitments to a larger number of artists and arts organisations. With a greater knowledge of future funding levels, artists and arts organisations are in a better position to undertake more accurate forward planning and to enter into longer-term and more efficient financial commitments.

Of the allocation of \$63.8 million appropriated from the Federal Budget in 1996-97, \$55.5 million (87 per cent) was used for direct financial support for arts activities, and the balance of \$8.3 million (13 per cent) was used for other support for arts activities, administration and general purposes.

An analysis of support for arts activities is given in the statistical tables at the end of this report. The Council strives for sound financial management and practices, and effective and efficient use of resources. Financial control systems and procedures are constantly reviewed. Financial performance is regularly monitored.

The Finance Section also liaises with internal and external auditors, and contributes to ministerial correspondence. It reviews and develops financial procedures, monitors controlling legislation and regulations, and keeps Council staff informed on procedures adopted by Council.

Internal and External Scrutiny

KPMG Chartered Accountants were retained as internal auditors for the year under review. In light of the new organisational and staffing structure, the audit programs were reviewed early in July 1996. Three audit examinations on disbursement, receipts, grant administration and computer systems in accordance with the revised audit programs, were undertaken during the year. The audit findings confirmed that Council's internal controls were effective and satisfactory.

The accounts and records of the financial transactions of the Council and the records relating to assets of the Council were inspected and audited by the Australian National Audit Office, in pursuance of section 39(1) of the Australia Council Act. The results of the inspection and audit were satisfactory.

Central Records

As the Council's central information area, Central Records:

- registers details of grant applications in the database;
- manages the safe handling, movement, retrieval, storage and disposal of documents and records related to grant application, assessment, decision and acquittal processes, and policy and administration;
- implements a program of cyclical maintenance to ensure that records are ready for reference as and when required, and that surplus or unwanted material is disposed of in accordance with the Archives Act;
- ensures that the right information arrives in the right hands at the right time.

During the 1996-97 year, Central Records Section registered and created 6,787 grant applications and related files, and 1,538 non-grant files. It also registered over 1,570 grant acquittals.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The principal functions of the Information Technology Section are to obtain, maintain, upgrade and assist with all matters relevant to the Council's computer and related software systems, and to provide Council and its staff with access to appropriate management information systems.

Major tasks accomplished by Information Technology in 1996-97 include:

- upgrading the memory and CPU power of

the Council's workstations so that they are capable of running more complex database applications. This led to improved stability and performance of other core applications such as Microsoft Exchange email software and various other databases, and also improved the Council's ability to upgrade to new systems as required;

- implementation of a Remote Access System so that executives and other relevant staff have access to email and other computerised information while travelling or working outside Council premises;
- modification to the Registry (grants administration) system, particularly in relation to program descriptions, summary reports and statistical coding;
- enhancements to the OpenPlus finance system to improve integration with the Registry system and report consolidation;
- upgrading of the Library workstations and databases.

Work was also carried out on two major ongoing projects:

- the development of a centralised mailing database for the Council;
- a review of the grants administration/registry system.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Under its own determination, the Council engages staff in accordance with the Australia Council Act. Terms and conditions of employment for Council staff have to date been similar to those for staff employed under the Public Service Act.

The objectives of the Human Resources Section are to maintain effective personnel, pay and recruitment systems for the Council and staff; to provide developmental opportunities for staff in line with corporate and individual goals; and to support and promote a safe

and healthy work environment with sound principles of industrial democracy and equal opportunity.

The major issues dealt with in 1996-97 include implementation of the Council's staffing restructure, assessment of changes to the public service through the review of the Public Service Act, and changes to the industrial relations framework through the Government's Workplace Relations Act.

Following the review of Council in 1996 and the creation of four Divisions, a major staffing restructure was undertaken. This was in response to the demands of the new organisational structure and the need to make further savings in line with Budget cuts. The staffing structure was agreed to by management, staff and the union on 18 December 1996 and the priority through early 1997 has been the placement of excess staff, and advertising and filling of vacant positions.

Council's agreed establishment level following the restructure was 118 positions. Senior executive positions were reduced from seven to five. The average staffing level for the 1996-97 year was 117. Permanent staff turnover for the year was 17 per cent, in comparison to the previous financial year of 24 per cent.

Workplace Relations

A Joint Consultative Council (JCC) works to foster good working relationships between staff and management. It has equal representation of union and management and meets quarterly. Consultation occurred on a wide range of topics, including staffing, equal employment opportunity, occupational health and safety, and general human resource issues.

Council's Workplace Bargaining Agreement 1995-96 continues in force until a new agreement is negotiated. The Agreement included changes to employment conditions which focus

on more 'family friendly' work practices and three staggered pay increases, with the final increase of two per cent implemented from October 1996.

With the introduction of the Workplace Relations Act in early 1997, Council has been reviewing how to proceed in developing a new Agreement and will begin negotiations with staff during the latter part of 1997.

Performance Appraisal

Performance pay was paid for Senior Executive staff and the General Manager during the financial year for the appraisal cycle 1995-96. Under the terms of Council's Workplace Agreement, Senior Officers did not receive performance pay. A total of six staff, including the General Manager, were eligible for performance pay and an aggregate amount of \$26,053 was paid.

Staff Development and Training

The Council has continued to show a firm commitment to staff development and has spent three per cent of its annual payroll on eligible training expenses. This resulted in a total of 384 staff days attendance at both internal and external training courses. In particular, Council supported an extensive change management program this year to assist staff in managing the restructure in a productive and positive manner. Council continues to provide a strong induction program and in-house computer training for new staff. In response to an increasing demand during the year Internet training was introduced. The other major training initiatives for the year were in the areas of media and public presentation and corporate planning.

Council recognises the benefits to the organisation in supporting staff in their career development and in 1997 approved 17 staff under its studies assistance program through a mixture of approved study leave and financial

assistance. In addition, nine students were supported under Council's Bursary program. The Council continues to support one senior staff member from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Section on a full time ATSIC Professional Study Grant program.

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)

The EEO Committee comprises representatives from management, staff and the union, and includes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative, a multicultural representative, and the Council's EEO coordinator.

The Council has again exceeded the APS-wide Year 2000 goals for employment of EEO targeted groups:

- women comprise 70 per cent of Council staff and numbers are evenly distributed in all sections and at all classifications;
- 17 per cent of staff identified as having non-English speaking backgrounds;
- 8 per cent of staff identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders;
- 5 per cent of staff identified as having a disability.

Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S)

Council is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment for staff through its OH&S policy. The OH&S Committee, which includes the OH&S representative, has an adviser from the Property Services area and management representation. The Committee takes responsibility for reporting to the JCC and for ensuring that staff have a forum to voice concerns and identify potential hazards.

To ensure that safe practices are observed by staff, the OH&S Committee arranges regular OH&S site inspections and during the year Council has responded to concerns about dust particles in the building by testing for lead levels. Test results indicated no significant uptake of lead caused by dust but as a precautionary measure new cleaning practices were introduced. All staff receive full ergonomic training

with individual assessments on a needs basis and supervisors have received OH&S training to ensure they meet their responsibilities under the legislation.

As part of Council's ongoing commitment to staff services, all staff have access to an Employee Assistance Program and are offered free, confidential counselling on a range of personal and work-related issues.

