

The Australia Council is the Australian Government's principal arts funding and advisory body. Its mission is to enrich the lives of Australians and their communities by supporting the creation and enjoyment of the arts.

The Australia Council cultivates Australia's creativity by investing in individuals and organisations working in Indigenous arts, community partnerships, culturally diverse and accessible arts, dance, media arts, literature, music, theatre and visual arts.

It supports the creation of original works, performances, publishing and exhibitions and builds capacity through skills development, cultural exchange and partnership opportunities. It invests in growing audiences and marketing the arts in Australia and abroad. It also develops research and cultural policy, advocacy for the arts and provides advice to government and industry.

The Australia Council is a statutory authority established under the *Australia Council Act 1975*. Led by a chairman appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the Minister for the Arts and Sport, the members of the Council have expertise in the arts, public policy, law, corporate governance, administration, education, and financial and business management.





The Sydney Writer's Festival showcased Australian and international authors in May 2006. Image courtesy Sydney Writers Festival. Photo Prudence Upton.

The Australia Council is strongly committed to providing a workplace that supports its people in delivering the outcomes of its Portfolio Budget Statement.

### **Certified Agreement**

On 23 March 2006, the Australia Council's new Certified Agreement 2006–2009 was certified. The Agreement involves pay increases of 12.6 per cent over the three-year life of the agreement (subject to preconditions being met).

The key features of the new Certified Agreement are the introduction of:

- > a broadband classification structure
- > an enhanced and broader based performance management framework
- > a closer link between performance and pay and a common pay advancement date for all employees
- > revised travel expense arrangements.

To support the new classification structure, detailed broadband classification guidelines and a new job evaluation system, known as work level standards, have been finalised with input from staff.

### **Learning and Development**

During 2005–06, a number of learning and development programs were conducted in-house. These programs focused on critical skills and compliance training in the areas of recruitment and selection, workplace diversity, GST compliance, contract management, project management and presentation.

The Australia Council implemented an online compliance program for all employees based on employment policies and specifically covering ethics and conduct, occupational health and safety, privacy, equal employment opportunity, sexual harassment prevention and bullying prevention. The program is designed to provide education and training on policy information related to employees' responsibilities in the workplace.

### **Recruitment**

In 2005–06, there were 54 commencements and 46 employee exits. During the year, recruitment activity primarily focused on finalisation of Arts Catalyst appointments, hiring fixed-term project management expertise and filling divisional administration roles.

### **Pro Bono Legal Services**

The Australia Council is pleased to have pro bono legal services partnerships with Baker & McKenzie and Clayton Utz.

Baker & McKenzie provides advice on commercial agreements and contracts, information technology, intellectual property and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts. Clayton Utz provides advice on administrative law, employment law and industrial relations, dispute resolution, privacy, freedom of information and testamentary matters.

The Australia Council benefits significantly from the committed work of both these providers and acknowledges their important contribution.

**Baker & McKenzie**

**CLAYTON UTZ**

### **Information Technology**

In 2005–06, the IT upgrade project was completed with the rollout of new desktop computers, the implementation of anti-spam software and the upgrade of the corporate email system. This has resulted in reduced IT downtime and increased productivity for employees.

Effort was also devoted to better risk management through the development of a comprehensive Disaster Recovery Plan that covers key business applications. The plan has undergone two successful tests at the Australia Council's disaster recovery facility.

The record types in the TRIM records management system have been consolidated to conform to the new Australia Council organisational structure and to better reflect business operations. These changes have made TRIM more accessible for employees and have led to improved records management.

The Australia Council has adopted a policy of digitisation of all grant contracts and acquittal material. A streamlined process for record scanning has been implemented to facilitate compliance with this policy.

The Grants Management System has undergone a number of significant enhancements, including the 'Bedrock Data' project, designed to simplify and improve the capture and reporting of performance information; and the Accrual Accounting project, which enhanced the interface to the Australia Council's Financial Management Information System and allowed the introduction of automated creditor's control functions.

### **Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

The Australia Council recognises that the workplace environment impacts employee performance and satisfaction. The Australia Council takes seriously the requirement to provide a safe and hazard-free workplace and to ensure that all employees are informed of and trained in their responsibilities and obligations under relevant legislation.

The Australia Council paid a lower premium rate to Comcare in 2005–06 because the number and average cost of claims decreased.

The focus has been on encouraging individual safety through a number of initiatives aimed at proactively managing health and safety awareness.

All new employees attend health and safety awareness training and complete self-auditing checklists at their workstations to ensure ergonomic compliance.

Included in staff induction is a program known as Fit for Work, which educates employees using PC-based equipment about ways to reduce the risk of or prevent a variety of occupational overuse injuries or incidents.

The timely and efficient reporting of incidents or injuries is expedited through the involvement of First Aid Officers who are trained in the importance of proactive reporting.

In 2005–06, the Australia Council undertook a review of the emergency evacuation arrangements at its premises at 372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills. The review resulted in revised and comprehensive emergency procedures, improved signage of evacuation procedures and exits, and training for all floor wardens.

### **Service Charter**

The Australia Council is committed to providing high quality services to clients and stakeholders. The Australia Council's Client Services Charter explains how services are delivered and is included in the 2005 and 2006 editions of the *Support for the Arts Handbook*, and is accessible to staff on the Australia Council's intranet. The Australia Council collects data on client complaints and its responses to them.

The Australia Council reviewed its Client Services Charter during 2005–2006 and will introduce a revised service charter in the next reporting period.

### **Complaints Procedure**

Customer feedback and complaints are a feature of the Australia Council Service Charter. The Australia Council encourages feedback as part of its continued focus on quality improvement, and it annually reviews compliance with the charter and identifies areas for improvement. This includes analysis of feedback and complaints received, as well as a process for input by clients, staff and stakeholders. The results of the client service monitoring process are publicly available.

Twenty-three complaints were received during the reporting period. Of the complaints received, 10 were from unsuccessful applicants. The most common causes for complaint included: credentials of decision-makers; conflict of interest; geographical disadvantage; and complaints about policies and initiatives. All complaints were addressed according to the Australia Council's Complaints Guidelines and three of the complainants were reasonably satisfied with the response they received. Of the 10 complainants who said they remained unsatisfied, three resulted in decisions review requests.

The Australia Council maintains and regularly reviews policies and procedures concerning selection of decision-makers and conflicts of interest. Australia Council's policies are developed in consultation with its peer bodies and the arts community and other stakeholders. Complaints received will be considered when reviewing Australia Council policies and procedures.

The number of complaints received during the reporting period cannot be compared with the 32 complaints received from 1 January to 30 June 2004, the first period for which complaints statistics are available. This is due to the public debate flowing from the Arts Catalyst restructure.

The Australia Council reviewed its client complaints procedure during the reporting year and will introduce a revised complaints procedure later in 2006.



## Commonwealth Disability Strategy

The Commonwealth Disability Strategy (CDS) provides a framework to assist Commonwealth organisations to meet their obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. The Australia Council is required to report on its performance in meeting the CDS under the designated core roles of policy adviser, purchaser, provider and employer.

Australia Council staff are committed to upholding organisational goals, one of which is to 'increase community engagement with the arts and to promote individual participation in them by increasing opportunities for all Australians to experience and participate in the arts and increasing access and reducing barriers to engagement with the arts'.

In the role of policy adviser, the Australia Council seeks to support the needs of people with disabilities in the arts sector. It does so by offering triennial support to Arts Access Australia (AAA), the peak body for arts and disability in Australia. AAA works to promote the rights of people with disabilities to participate in and determine their cultural life. The Australia Council is committed to making its programs accessible to people with disabilities. The input of AAA and other representatives helps to shape Australia Council policy and programs.

Public announcements are available in accessible formats for people with disabilities in a timely manner. All media announcements are made available on the Australia Council website in html format. Information is also distributed in hard copy. The Australia Council's *Support for the Arts Handbook* is available online and in audio and disk form as close as possible to the time of publication. There is a TTY facility available to contact the Australia Council about services and programs.

Grants application forms include a statistics-gathering page. This provides applicants with the opportunity to self-identify as having a physical or intellectual disability.

The Australia Council is also an employer, with responsibility to ensure that recruitment, employment and professional development policies and procedures comply with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. Accessible formats for potential job applicants are provided by mail, fax and online on request. Advertisements have also been included on the Australia Council website.

The Australia Council's Human Resources team has developed recruitment and selection guidelines that promote merit selection and non-discriminatory decisions. The HR team is also developing resources for induction, aiming to provide new employees with an understanding of the Australia Council's functions and policies, which include non-discrimination and diversity. Statistics relating to diversity are also collected and reported at least annually.

The Australia Council has internal and external grievance procedures, including a review of actions procedure modelled on the procedure under the *Public Service Act 1999*. The Australia Council's review of actions procedure provides for appeals to the Merit Protection Commissioner. Staff also have access to a professional counselling service through the Employee Assistance Program.

## Freedom of Information

This statement provides required information under Section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act).

## Powers

Under Section 6 of the *Australia Council Act 1975*, the Council has the power to do all things that are necessary or convenient to be done in connection with the performance of its functions and, in particular, has power:

- a) to enter into contracts
- b) to erect buildings
- c) to occupy, use and control any land or building owned or held under lease by Australia and made available for the purposes of the Council
- d) to acquire, hold and dispose of real or personal property
- e) to accept gifts, devises and bequests made to the Council, whether on trust or otherwise, and to act as trustee of moneys or other property vested in the Council upon trust
- f) to make grants or loans of money, and to provide scholarships or other benefits, on such conditions as it thinks fit
- g) to cooperate with the states and local governing bodies and with other persons and organisations concerned with the arts
- h) to do anything incidental to any of its powers.

### Arrangements for membership of the Council, boards and committees

The chair of the Council is appointed by the Governor-General. All other members of the Council are appointed by the Minister for the Arts and Sport. The Council consists of up to 14 part-time members, including the chair and deputy chair, chairs of each board, arts practitioners and community interest representatives. The Australia Council CEO is a member of the Council *ex officio*. Members of the Council meet five to six times per year. Meetings are also held by teleconference as the need arises. The Act allows for the appointment of either a full-time or part-time chair.

The various boards and divisions administer the Australia Council's arts funding role and are a major source of advice to the Council on the development of arts policy and grant programs.

Under Section 7 of the *Australia Council Act 1975*, the Council has delegated to the relevant boards, and to senior officers in certain circumstances, the power to make grants, within the framework of the Australia Council's priorities, policies and budget allocations. The majority of board members are people who practise the arts or are otherwise associated with the arts. They bring to the boards first-hand knowledge of the particular requirements of the artform or the specific discipline, as well as a collective national overview. They participate in board meetings by providing expert advice on the assessment of grant applications and the development of artform policy. Advisers drawn from the Register of Peers augment the expertise of board members. The concept of peer group assessment within the boards and divisions is a principle of the Australia Council.

Decisions by the Major Performing Arts Board are made in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between DCITA and the Australia Council. Decisions are made at formally constituted meetings.

In specific circumstances, duly delegated senior officers may make decisions to commit expenditure in relation to decisions on activities and strategic initiatives previously approved at formally constituted Council, board or committee meetings. These decisions by senior officers are taken in compliance with the Australia Council's Financial and Administrative Delegations.

Procedures for public consultation are used at different times by the boards, the divisions and the Council. For example:

- > public meetings held in various centres, both metropolitan and regional, generally in conjunction with Council and board meetings
- > public meetings held by board directors and other senior members of staff, either independently or in association with other arts organisations
- > discussion groups or seminars held with invited members of the public
- > draft discussion papers circulated for comment
- > 'open interviews' held when board and divisional staff are interstate and available to meet current and prospective clients
- > regular meetings held between senior Australia Council officers and officers of state/territory arts authorities
- > continuing liaison between government departments and authorities (Australian, state/territory and local), as well as overseas agencies
- > views from the public invited when submissions are being prepared on topics of particular interest to the arts community.

### Categories of documents

The Australia Council uses the following documents and manuals in making decisions and recommendations:

- > *Australia Council Act 1975*
- > Relevant Commonwealth legislation
- > Australia Council Corporate Plan 2006–2010
- > Australia Council policies (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts, Arts in a Multicultural Australia, Regional Arts Development, Young People and the Arts)
- > Procedures and protocols for management of grants and projects
- > *Manual for Members* of the Australia Council, 2004 and 2005
- > Register of Peers Handbook
- > *Support for the Arts Handbook*, 2005 and 2006
- > Grant and initiative application forms, 2005 and 2006
- > Research papers
- > Terms and conditions of employment
- > Minutes and agendas (Council, boards, committees and assessment panels)
- > Program reviews
- > Program guidelines (CPMD)
- > Financial and Administrative Delegations, 2002, 2005 and 2006
- > Australia Council Service Charter.

### Freedom of Information procedures

Applicants seeking access under the FOI Act to documents in the possession of the Australia Council should forward a \$40 application fee and apply in writing to:

Chief Executive Officer  
Attention: FOI Coordinator  
Australia Council for the Arts  
PO Box 788 Strawberry Hills NSW  
2012

The FOI Coordinator is available at the Australia Council offices, located at 372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW, or by telephone on 02 9215 9000 or 1800 226 912 toll-free during normal business hours. The offices are wheelchair accessible.

In accordance with Section 54 of the FOI Act, an applicant may, within 30 days of receiving notification of a decision to refuse a request under the Act, apply to the CEO seeking an internal review of that decision. A \$40 application fee, as provided for in the FOI Act, should accompany this application. An officer of the Australia Council, who is at least one level above that of the initial decision-maker, will conduct the review.

#### Facilities for access

If it approves access, and after it has received payment of any charges that apply, the Australia Council will provide copies of the documents concerned.

Alternatively, applicants may arrange to inspect documents at the Australia Council offices at the above address. For applicants living outside NSW, documents can be viewed at the nearest regional office of the National Archives of Australia (Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth or Townsville).

The application fees and charges for FOI requests are determined in Schedules to the FOI (Fees and Charges) Regulations. Charges may be remitted on request if their imposition would cause undue financial hardship or release of the documents is in the general public interest. A decision not to remit the charges must be made within 30 days of a request being made.

#### Freedom of Information 2005–06

There were two requests for information under the FOI Act during 2005–06.

### Ecologically Sustainable Development

The Australia Council's Ecologically Sustainable Development Policy encompasses strategies for energy, paper and waste reduction. The policy confirms the Australia Council's commitment to minimising the impact its day-to-day operations have on the environment.

#### Energy consumption

| Year    | Energy (kWh) |
|---------|--------------|
| 2005–06 | 809,146      |
| 2004–05 | 835,500      |

#### Paper consumption (A4 80gsm copy paper)

| Year    | Reams |
|---------|-------|
| 2005–06 | 4480  |
| 2004–05 | 5200  |

#### Recycled paper

| Year    | Weight (kg) |
|---------|-------------|
| 2005–06 | 22,378      |
| 2004–05 | 22,646      |

#### Recycled glass, plastic and aluminium

| Year     | Weight (kg) |
|----------|-------------|
| 2005–06  | 1336        |
| 2004–05• | 800         |

• Recycling figures in 2004–05 are from January to June 2005 only.

#### Advertising

The Australia Council uses print advertising to recruit new staff, announce new programs and initiatives, notify grant program closing dates, invite potential and existing clients to meet with Australia Council staff, and to call for tenders.

The total cost of staff recruitment advertising for 2005–06 was \$51,253, up from \$39,997 in 2004–05. Advertising for other purposes—including notification of Australia Council programs, client meetings and closing dates and tenders—totalled \$103,425, an increase from \$64,017 in 2004–05.