

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates Hearing 21-24 May 2012

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1.3 Support Services for Government Operations

Topic: Blog publication - Australia in the Asian Century

Senator: Senator Ryan

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Question:

Senator RYAN: but I would suggest that "Publication of blog" in that case at least might be a touch of an understatement, although I think you might be a touch ambitious about how many people might tune in and watch such speeches.

How many blog sites have been created for the Australia in the Asian Century white paper and being funded by the department?

Ms Leon: We do not have the Asian century people here to give you that detail. We have got this information about the specific contracts that you asked about. I will have to take on notice any more information about Asian century matters until those people are here.

Senator RYAN: I have been told that there are four publicly funded blog sites as part of the Australia in the Asian Century process. We have just had this one, which I appreciate the Australian Institute of International Affairs is slightly more than a blog, for \$20,000 for a three-month period. We have the \$33,000 blog spectacular that is the Lowy Institute for 65 working days-at roughly \$500 a day. These are both only for three months, from 1 April to 30 June. What I would like you to take on notice is any outsourced contract for blog or communications services that are related to the Australia in the Asian Century process-and I am happy if I just get AusTender numbers to actually chase up the total costs myself. Quite frankly, \$33,000 for a 65-day blog does seem a little over the top.

Senator Chris Evans: We will make sure that you get more than just the AusTender number because, as we have already established, they are not necessarily a very accurate description of what the project is. We can certainly give you a summary of the project and the tender number.

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Senator RYAN: Sure. Okay.

Ms Leon: And to the extent that I can, I will endeavour to see whether there is any comparative material available about the ordinary cost of outsourced blog moderation to see whether there is any reason why that figure would not be an entirely reasonable figure to pay. Certainly when we pay consultants to undertake consultations and analytical work for us in a paper based rather than online environment their charges are always considerably more than \$500 a day.

Answer:

Four organisations have been engaged by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to supplement consultation processes amongst Australians for the 'Australia in the Asian Century' White Paper. These organisations have promoted community discussion, including online, through establishing blog sites, organising student competitions and hosting round-table and other discussion forums. These online discussions have played an important role in bringing fresh thinking and perspectives on Australia's relationship with the region to the attention of the White Paper Task Force. The partnerships have also been important tools for raising the profile of the White Paper in order to expand the reach of the Task Force's engagement and consultation processes, both within Australia and overseas, and to fulfil the White Paper's terms of reference commitment to an open discussion about Australia's future.

A summary description of each of the organisation's activities is outlined below:

East Asia Forum

The East Asia Forum website (run by the East Asian Bureau of Economic Research (EABER) at the Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University) has hosted an Australia in the Asian Century blog series. The site has 17,000 subscribers, and as at 13 June 2012 had received 41,364 direct web 'hits' (readers) to the 20 articles published. These articles were also sent by email to 720 individual subscribers, and more than 800 subscribers to an RSS feed. Five articles were featured in the East Asia Forum's weekly email that has 17,665 subscribers. The EAF estimates total readership for this series at a minimum of 146,969 people.

This blog was conceived and structured as part of the White Paper consultation process; although no specific financial support was provided by the Department.

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The Conversation

The Conversation website created a dedicated Asian Century article series. The series was developed through a callout to the website's 2,600 academic authors, resulting in 95 proposed ideas, from which 20 articles were commissioned. These articles attracted a readership of more than 21,900 people. Three hundred and thirty-four readers 'liked' or commented on an article on Facebook, 256 people tweeted using a dedicated #austasiancentury hashtag, and 62 people made comments on the articles on The Conversation website.

Several articles first published on the Conversation website were subsequently published by the mainstream media, including in Fairfax newspapers and ABC Online's The Drum opinion site.

In addition, The Conversation hosted a roundtable (in conjunction with the Australian Institute of International Affairs) where five of its published academics discussed their ideas with Dr Ken Henry. An edited video of this discussion is available through the Conversation and Australia in the Asian Century websites.

The total cost of this engagement was \$1,817, which covered the cost of airfares for four academics and two staff members from The Conversation to attend the roundtable in Canberra. All other activities were provided at no cost to the Department.

Australian Institute of International Affairs

The Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) was engaged to target two audiences – young people and the general public – through online activities.

Engaging young people:

In partnership with The University of Melbourne and the United Nations Youth Association, the AIIA established the website www.australiasroleintheworld.org.au. AIIA have included the Asian Century as one of five topics for young people to engage with on the site.

The AIIA's youth engagement program also included running four youth-focused competitions: two essay competitions for university and high school students; a multimedia presentation competition in which young people were invited to submit a vision of what the Asia Century meant to them; and a journalism competition, which

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invited young people to make a program pitch for a 30-minute radio or television documentary on the Asian Century.

(<http://www.australiasroleintheworld.org.au/australia-in-the-asian-century-competition/>)

As of 12 June 2012, the www.australiasroleintheworld.org.au site had received 20,602 page views from 6,687 visits by 3,697 unique users. Ninety-seven comments were posted on the site and competition entries online received 83 'likes'. The competition winning essays have also been published in the AIIA's youth publication "Monthly ACCESS" which is distributed to more than 1,600 subscribers and is available online at <http://www.aiaa.asn.au/access-home>.

Engaging the general public:

The AIIA has also organised a series of high-profile speakers to discuss Australia in the Asian Century. Speakers have included Allan Gyngell, Gareth Evans, Hugh White, Philip Flood, Murray McLean, Robert Pritchard, Chris Rahman, Victor Fung Shuen Sit, Mike McCluskey, Rowan Callick, Christopher Lamb, Anthony Ware, Ric Smith and Andrew O'Neil.

As of 14 June 2012, five of these speeches have been made available on the AIIA's YouTube channel. Six have been made available to A-PAC (Australia's public affairs channel) and one has already been broadcast.

The AIIA facilitated the roundtable discussion for The Conversation website and provided audio visual services for the roundtable, including the edited video.

The cost to the Department of the above services provided by the AIIA is \$20,000 (GST inclusive). (AusTender number CN482838.)

This consists of approximately \$6,000 in competition prizes, including AIIA memberships, publication costs in the Monthly journal of the AIIA, and flight and accommodation costs for competition winners to attend an Asian Century themed event in Canberra and meet senior members of the task force and advisory panel; \$1,500 for advertising and promotion; \$5,500 for audio visual equipment; \$4,500 for website development and server hosting costs; and \$2,500 to support the Conversation roundtable.

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The Interpreter, The Lowy Institute

The Lowy Institute has been engaged to host a blog feature on 'Australia in the Asian Century' through their 'Lowy interpreter' site over four months from 19 March 2012. The site has the characteristics of a magazine, published online, and averages 3,000 unique visitors each weekday. 'The Lowy interpreter' has an extensive and influential readership and is linked to other influential sites in Asia.

In January 2012, the Global Go To Think Tanks Ratings, produced by the University of Pennsylvania's International Relations program rated the Lowy Institute as Asia's top think-tank in its use of the internet to engage with the public, second in Asia for its public engagement programs and fifth think-tank in Asia overall.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/120118_EMBARGOE_D%20Diplomatic%20Courier%20Global%20Go-To%20Think%20Tanks%20Report%20with%20Dr%20%20James%20G%20%20McGann.pdf

The Lowy Institute was engaged in 2010 to run a blog series for Australia's Aid Effectiveness Review. (<http://aidreview.lowyinterpreter.org>) The Australia in the Asian Century blog has built on that experience and been more integrated with the wider 'Lowy interpreter' site, which has resulted in a higher number of site visitors.

As of 15 June 2012 the site has published 79 posts in this series.

The total cost to the Department of this engagement is \$33,000 (GST inclusive). This consists of \$4,800 to engage outside web designers to design and create the blog feature platform; \$14,825 for the services of a professional editor with extensive experience in foreign affairs issues and a web publisher, to commission writing, edit articles and moderate and publish feedback; \$5,500 for paid writing for the blog from experts and translation of articles written in languages other than English; and \$4,875 for web hosting costs. (AusTender number CN482849)