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Colleen Fitzpatrick  
Chairperson  
Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Funds Boards

Hon Jennifer Rankine MP  
Minister for Education and Child Development  
GPO Box 1563  
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Minister Rankine

**Re your correspondence 14MECD1244**

I am sorry that I did not respond to your letter within the required time frame, but I have been overseas for some weeks. On my return, a meeting was scheduled for last week, but that was subsequently cancelled, so I am responding to your questions in writing.

Please note that there in fact three trust funds, each with a board. The board members are identical, and in the response below I have referred to the board in singular rather than plural as the board functions as one board overseeing the three funds.

- ***Whether the functions of the board should continue in its current form, whether it could be merged with another, or if there is an alternate way to deliver the services it provides***

I strongly recommend that the board should continue in its current form. The Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Funds are unique in Australia in the support that they provide to children and young people who are or have been under the Guardianship of the Minister.

The board is established in the Trust Fund deeds.

The composition of the board reflects the spirit of partnership between SACOSS and the government from when the original fund was established as a collaborative venture. This board reflects the partnership in a tangible and positive way.

- ***Whether the community engagement through the board is superior to all other options***

The board provides a mix of service users from all aspects of foster care – young people, carers, disability, aboriginal, care leavers. The provision for deputy members has helped to resolve some of the challenges the board has faced in engaging with younger people and ensuring that their voice is heard

around the table.

Board members have been involved in promotion of the fund. Beneficiaries have been involved in decision making. The processes that have been developed assist in sharing the scarce resources, and also separate the decision making from departmental bureaucracy which means that the department cannot be blamed for decisions.

The inclusion of young people provides an opportunity for those who can/could benefit from the grants to provide their perspective on how to use this resource.

- ***Whether abolition of the board will have a negative impact on business or community confidence***

The abolition of the board would remove the value added component that members bring to the trust funds. Members are not paid for their time, and so the hours that they commit to assessing applications and attending board meetings and related events come at no cost.

The board is currently focusing on ensuring that the trust funds are sustainable into the future. Some support is provided for this by the Project Officer, but the networks and time commitment of board members are further added value to the funds, It is also planned to engage 'ambassadors' to support and promote the fund. Board members are using their networks to seek sponsorship. Should the board be disbanded, this resource would be lost.

- ***What the risks are in abolishing the board?***

The board brings expertise – disability, being in care, aboriginal, carers. These voices are important when allocating the scarce resources of the funds.

The current project officer is exemplary. However it is not possible to rely on the level of support that is currently being received. Should there be no board in place, the trust funds could lose momentum and rapidly dwindle to nothing.

Abolishing the board could diminish the relationship between SACOSS and the government. The fund was established as a joint venture, and the board allows SACOSS to have a role in the running of the trust funds and the distribution of them

A further risk would be the loss of the opportunity for raising further funds - board members are actively pursuing corporate sponsorship, and merchant bank opportunities.

Another risk is whether the current high level of satisfaction of those who use the Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Funds express would be sustained. Grant recipients are able to provide feedback, and this is detailed in annual reports. There is a high level of satisfaction with the fund.

- ***If there is significant legal or financial advantage in retaining the board***

The trust deeds require that there is a board.

It is worth noting that board members are volunteers, so there is no financial advantage in disbanding the board – and the project officer's hours may need to be increased in order to manage the assessing of applications and the decision making process.

It could be argued that there is a better chance of sustaining the fund if we have community members (volunteers) who can promote it into the community. This fund has allowed the Minister's children to have access to resources and opportunities they would not otherwise have. It has supported them when there is no other opportunity for them, and it is unique in Australia.

• **How the board is constituted**

The board is made up of:

- Two persons under the age of 30 who are or have been subject to a guardianship order, or in a long term family placement financially supported by the Department for Families and Communities under the guardianship of the Minister.
- One person nominated from the South Australian Council of Social Service
- One person nominated from a body representing foster carers in South Australia
- Two persons nominated by the Minister, at least one of whom must have experience at a senior level of government
- One person representing the interests of Aboriginal children and young people
- One person nominated from an organization capable of representing young people who have been under the guardianship of the Minister
- Two deputy members - young persons under 30 years of age who will have voting rights of a full board member who is absent from a formal board meeting

• **What is the function of the board is and how the board is funded?**

The board is established in the trust fund deed:

**5. The Board**

*5.1 There will be a Board to be known as the Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund for Children and Young People Board of Advice.*

**6. Functions and Duties of the Board**

*6.1 The Function of the Board shall be to:*

*6.1.1 Generally assist the (Public) Trustee as required, and without in any way limiting the generality of such assistance, carry out the following duties:*

- a) consider applications for a grant from the Trust Fund;*
- b) prepare a report for the Trustee recommending selected applicants whom the Board considers are eligible....*
- c) provide recommendations to the Trustee as to the*

*c) provide recommendations to the Trustee as to the amount of funds that should be distributed to each beneficiary....*

6.1.2 Report annually to the Minister as to the operation of the Trust; and

6.1.3 Do such other things as the Trustee may require of the Board

*((Deed of Variation between the minister for Families and Communities and Public Trustee dated 29 April 2009 which refers to the deed from 5 February 2003 which established 'a charitable trust fund known as the Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund for Children and Young People.'*

In doing this, the board seeks information from relevant experts eg in the last year we have spoken with the Guardian of Children and Young People, as well as an Information Technology specialist from within the Department for Education and Child Development. This consultations are undertaken to ensure that the board has up to date background information to enhance the decision making process.

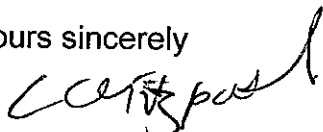
- ***How the board is supported in terms of FTES and operational budget allocation.***

The board is supported by .5 FTE and operational support. This ensures that the website is maintained, that inquiries are answered, applications received and processed (added to data base, scanned, sent to board members, outcomes of board deliberations are recorded, applicants notified, correspondence managed, payments organized and all queries to do with these processes are managed). The Project Officer also supports the board by preparing meeting agendas and minutes and distributing these to board members as well as tending to all other required administrative tasks.

Board members assess applications and make the decisions about allocating funds to them.

In conclusion, while appreciating the Premier's decision to review boards and committees, I would argue that the Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Funds Board(s) should be retained given that they have been established by the Trust Fund deeds, and that all members are volunteers most – if not all – who do not claim reimbursement for their travel costs. Given my involvement when the original fund was established, I am aware that the intention of those establishing this Fund was to include those who benefit from the funds to have a voice in the governance of the fund as well as involving people with expertise from within the community.

Yours sincerely



Colleen Fitzpatrick  
Chairperson, Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Funds Boards

CC Ross Womersley SACOSS