

"Theatre Ensemble" to graduate from government subvention system

The Home Affairs Bureau today (March 12) welcomed the setting up of the "PIP Cultural Industries" by "Theatre Ensemble" and its decision not to receive government recurrent subvention starting from 2008-09.

A spokesman for the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) said that as "Theatre Ensemble" headed towards a new mode of operation following its development under the Government's subvention system, it had shed light on the possibilities of future development for the performing arts groups in Hong Kong.

" 'Theatre Ensemble', having received subvention from the Government and the Arts Development Council (ADC) for 15 years since it was set up in 1993, has now graduated from the government subvention system. The case has proved the effectiveness and success of Government's policy on developing budding performing arts groups and artists through providing regular funding support," the spokesman said.

When "Theatre Ensemble" was set up in 1993, it was funded by the then Council for Performing Arts and was granted subvention by the ADC for the first time under its three-year grant scheme in 2002-03. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) had also provided it with good performing opportunities through its cultural presentation programmes. Since 2007, the group has been receiving direct recurrent funding from HAB.

In 2004, "Theatre Ensemble", in collaboration with the Hong Kong Arts Centre and with the support of ADC, became a resident troupe of the former and has successfully launched the resident programme "PIP Let's Play", a pioneer to the "Venue Partnership Scheme" to be launched by the LCSD soon.

The spokesman said, "The change in operating mode of 'Theatre Ensemble' has provided a real case study for the upcoming Government review on the funding mechanism and policy for the performing arts. To follow up on the recommendation of the Committee on Performing Arts in its Recommendation Report (I) submitted in 2006, the HAB is planning to commission an independent consultancy study in the coming one to two months on a new funding mechanism and a new set of assessment criteria for the major performing arts groups receiving recurrent government

subvention with a view to formulating a mechanism that is conducive to the vibrant growth and sustainable development of the professional arts groups. Other than the model of recurrent subvention, the consultancy study will also cover the other funding models that suit the development of the arts groups, including co-investment, matching grant, loans, venue or other tangible or intangible policy support measures. The development of 'Theatre Ensemble' has affirmed the importance and direction of the consultancy study."

The consultancy study will start in April/May this year and is expected to complete in the first half of 2009. The Government will also explore how to draw up an assessment mechanism applicable to performing arts groups with different modes of operation.

It is the Government's expectation that "Theatre Ensemble" will continue to strive for artistic excellence, create productions of high artistic standard, support local arts development to nurture local talents, as well as provide the public with high-quality cultural programmes after it has ceased to receive recurrent government subvention.

The Chairman of both the Committee on Performing Arts and the Funding Committee for the Performing Arts, Dr Darwin Chen, also welcomed the graduation of "Theatre Ensemble" from the existing government funding framework and the establishment of "PIP Cultural Industries" as it transforms from a government-funded performing arts group to a cultural industry operation.

Dr Chen saw the success of "Theatre Ensemble" as a live example that the arts does command economic and market values. The group's success challenges the popular belief that there is a clear dichotomy between "business" and "the arts". The direction that "Theatre Ensemble" has taken gives a concrete definition to what is meant by the term cultural industry. By turning cultural endeavours into a cultural industry, it does not necessarily mean compromising on the achievement of artistic values. Rather, it means making the operation a business operation and adopting business management practices in the development of culture and the arts.

Dr Chen agreed that the development path of "Theatre Ensemble" might not be applicable across the board to all performing arts groups receiving government subvention. The difference in art form, in artistic direction and the stage of development of the arts groups will determine the suitability of funding policy

measures for the groups. He anticipated that the independent consultancy study would have a comprehensive and objective discussion on the issue and would put forward policy recommendations.

As the new "PIP Theatre" and "PIP Theatre Kids" under "PIP Cultural Industries" will continue the artistic direction of "Theatre Ensemble", the Government's support to the new setup as a professional arts group will remain unchanged, including co-operation with LCSD in programme presentations.

Ends/Wednesday, March 12, 2008