



Information Minister, Senator the Hon. Sandra Falconer, says that since the passage of the Access To Information Act in 2002, there has been increasing usage by members of the public and civil society.

The Minister noted that in the last five years, the total number of applications received for access to information increased by over 180 per cent. Last year alone saw 1,260 application requests, with less than one per cent being denied, she reported.

Senator Falconer was addressing the launch of the 2012 Access to Information National High School Essay Competition, at the Office of the Prime Minister, in Kingston, on September 26. This year's competition requests students in third to sixth form to write a 2,500-word essay on the topic: 'The Access To Information Act (2002) encourages and facilitates an informed public and public participation in Governmental Affairs'.

She explained that the public is not only interested in holding government accountable, but "they want to ensure taxpayers get value for money."

"The public's right to know and having access to information can only serve to strengthen our democracy, promote transparency, accountability and increased participation in governance and the national decision-making process," the Minister said.

Director of the Access to Information Unit at the OPM, Damian Cox, explained that the aim of the competition is to encourage young people to think critically about the Act and the rights it provides to members of the public.

"It is also intended that our students will gain a deeper appreciation for the potential uses and benefits of the Act to them as students, as well as members of the public engaged in their communities," he said.

Winner of the 2011/12 competition, Kerry-Anne Mayne, who now attends law school, endorsed the competition, saying that she is even more appreciative of the ATI legislation, as she has seen what it has done for the country now, in comparison to the period prior to its implementation. She joined the call for young people to get involved and inform themselves.

Meanwhile, Chairperson of the Access to Information Advisory Stakeholders Committee, Dr. Carolyn Gomes, expressed the hope that twice as many students enter the competition this year. "It's really a great pleasure to be here in our 50th year, looking at our next 50 years going forward and inviting young people to know more, to learn more and to teach us more by their essay remarks," she said.

The deadline for the competition is January 31, 2013. The first, second and third place finishers will win trophies and prize money of \$30,000, \$20,000 and \$15,000, respectively.