ACDICT Press Release

Getting support for ICT right

Wednesday 17 April 2013. The Australian Council of Deans of ICT (ACDICT) notes recent developments regarding ICT and is wondering if anyone will ever get support for ICT right.

ACDICT has been active in trying to ensure that ICT is recognised as an integral part of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) skills. It considers further effort is still required to ensure all relevant stakeholders make such connections. The government is a key stakeholder and gets it right with one hand, and wrong with the other.

The recent report on “Lifting our STEM Skills” and its key findings, released by the Australian Industry Group (Ai Group), identified ICT as a key component of STEM.

“It is a pleasure to see Ai Group’s continuing effort to recognise and promote ICT as an integral part of STEM and to note a range of ICT occupations that help build local business communities where STEM skills are essential. These include software and application programmers; ICT business and systems analysts; database and systems administrators; environmental scientists; and various other occupations,” said Professor Leon Sterling, President of ACDICT.

The Ai Group is a peak industry association which represents the interests of more than 60,000 businesses in a wide range of sectors of the Australian economy. Professor Sterling is heartened that the Ai Group sees and advocates the importance of essential STEM skills and their impact on future economic and social well-being of the nation. The Ai Group is committed to help drive the industry to become better engaged in the promotion of STEM skills at all levels of education and training.

The Prime Minister was right when she said that information technology jobs are the quintessential jobs of the future. Yet, when it came to the recent government announcement of $12.4 million new funding to help improve teaching standards in maths and science in schools, ICT was specifically excluded. It has been recognised that the quality of maths and science school teachers needs improvement. It has also been widely recognised, particularly by universities who take these school students, that the same applies to teachers of ICT.

“Government should address the issue holistically and consider alternatives to improve the teaching of ICT in secondary schools by providing adequate funding, as ICT is vital for the future well-being in Australia; doing it for maths and science is only addressing part of the solution,” said Professor Sterling.

ACDICT supports the view of the Ai Group that it is vital to address the apparent lack of engagement of students with the broad range of STEM disciplines. Improved cooperation and coordination of industry and academia, in conjunction with the Office of the Chief Scientist, are required to realistically address such issues. It is also important to highlight the enabling and central role of ICT throughout STEM disciplines.

“The recent announcement of increased funding for schools is required to provide funding targeted at Australia’s real needs and make specific provisions for increasing the teaching quality of ICT”, said Professor Sterling.
“Furthermore, without addressing the chronic shortage of skilled ICT teachers in schools, the realisation of the Prime Minister’s comment that the quintessential jobs of the future lie in ICT will not be available to domestically educated students”, added Professor Sterling.

ACDICT was formed in July 2008, and since 2010 has had a Learning and Teaching Academy (ALTA), which aims to further improve the teaching of ICT in higher education. ALTA works closely with industry, academics, and students to provide a better learning and teaching experience for ICT students and improve their learning outcomes.

The 4th annual ALTA Forum was held at Victoria University on 4–5 April. Associate Professor Iwona Miliszewska, the President of ALTA, said that: “While we are actively engaged with improving teaching at the higher education level, we need to make a greater concerted effort to improve the standards of ICT teaching in secondary schools to attract more secondary school graduates to further studies in this vital area.”

ALTA awards grants for improving learning and teaching in ICT in higher education and winners for this year were announced at the Forum. Winning grants were for benchmarking of exam questions, developing interpersonal skills online, and assessing work readiness of ICT graduates. A grant for communicating ICT to indigenous students was also awarded.

Professor Miliszewska further commented that “Greater industry involvement would help stimulate school student interest in ICT. Greater engagement with industry role models, to which school students could relate, as well as provision of authentic and relevant learning experiences for the students, could play an important role in helping students appreciate the true nature of ICT jobs.”

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About Australian Council of Deans of ICT (ACDICT)
The Australian Council of Deans of ICT (ACDICT) is the peak body representing all Australian universities that teach ICT in degree programs. It aims to promote and advance ICT education, research and scholarship on behalf of Australian universities.

About Prof Leon Sterling
Prof Leon Sterling is the President of ACDICT since July 2012. He is the Dean of Faculty of Information and Communication Technologies at Swinburne University of Technology. His research expertise is on agent-oriented software engineering and he is a member of the Centre for Computing and Engineering Software Systems.

About Associate Professor Iwona Miliszewska
Prof Iwona Miliszewska is Deputy President of ACDICT since July 2012, and President of ALTA in this capacity. She is Victoria University’s first Endeavour Executive Award winner and is passionate about improving the practice of teaching and learning, strengthening the teaching-research nexus, and promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning.