Communique: Building productive industry-university collaboration in ICT

On 21 April, the Office of the Chief Scientist, Australian Information Industry Association, Australian Council of Deans of ICT, and the Australian Council of Deans of Engineering convened a national forum to chart the future for Australian ICT education.

More than 90 leaders from business, government and universities came together to discuss the needs of the future economy, and the implications for degree programs today.

Opening the forum, Australia's Chief Scientist Dr Alan Finkel set out the challenge: make Australia's ICT graduates world exemplars. He emphasised that no industry can create more wealth for our country than technology, in particular ICT; and the importance of acting now to develop the skills.

Noting the irony of an ICT labour market in which 'employers are struggling to get workers whilst graduates are struggling to get jobs', the Chief Scientist called for new approaches to graduates with the optimal mix of deep discipline knowledge, complex problem solving skills, creativity and business nous.

Discussions centred on practical measures to help universities and industry project and prepare for fast-changing workforce needs.

One thing was clear—industry and university participants were unanimous in their commitment to work together in a more coordinated, coherent and meaningful way.

Following the workshop, 25 participants have already volunteered to work with the organisers to take an action plan forward.

Some of the specific actions that will be considered include:

- Developing a reciprocal exchange program between university academics and industry.
- Establishing a national annual review process between ICT faculties and industry that identifies the core and emerging issues in the technology sector.
- Setting out a common understanding of key graduate attributes.
- Collaborating on the implementation of for-credit work integrated learning at the national scale in ICT; aligning with the National Strategy on Work Integrated Learning.
- Developing best practice guidelines for the effective operation of industry advisory boards in universities.

Forum participants also expressed strong support for the establishment of a standing national-level body of ICT leaders from industry and universities. This body will have carriage of implementing or coordinating most of the actions once agreed, including support for improved information sharing and bench-marking across individual university advisory boards.

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