

The Australian Council of Deans of Information and Communications Technology (ACDICT) met for their first Annual Council Meeting at Swinburne University of Technology on 23-24 July 2009.

The CEOs from the Australian Computer Society (Mr Sam Burrell) and Australian Information Industry Association (Mr Ian Birks) were also in attendance and both spoke about strengthening relationships and having greater collaboration with the university sector. Associate Professor Peter Cole (Murdoch University), the President of ACDICT, said that there now exists a unity of purpose between academia and industry which will be to everyone's mutual benefit.

In this vein, the Council discussed its support for Professor Cole in representing the higher education ICT sector on the new Federal Government's Information Technology Industry Innovation Council under the direction of Minister Kim Carr and chaired by Mr John Grant Managing Director Data#3. "The breadth and depth of ICT innovation in university research that has given many benefits to society provides a solid contribution to this IT innovation council" said Professor Cole.

A general theme was the central importance of ICT to the well-being of people and the national economy and how it is integrated into every walk of life. As such, judicious use of ICT can provide solutions to a wide variety of economic and global problems, such as easing traffic congestion with smart systems and enabling technological and business transformations that lead to making improvements in industries that impact on environmental quality.

Even during the economic downturn attributable to the global financial crisis, there is still a chronic shortage of skilled ICT graduates to meet industry demands. The ubiquitous and fundamental role of ICT, such as in medicine, mining, agriculture, finance, entertainment and engineering, means that skilled ICT graduates are in demand for a wide range of jobs. "There is likely to be a job to satisfy just about any student interest in ICT" said Professor Cole.

The Council of Deans of ICT is naturally concerned with providing the best educational experience for their students. As such, the Council is involved in several projects and activities to investigate optimal learning conditions, including the best combination and duration of student learning in academia and industry whilst completing their degrees. ICT graduates in the workplace have reported the value of work-integrated learning whilst being students, and employers have expressed their desire for graduates with work experience. "Work integrated learning provides many benefits to students, academics and industry and does require considerable organisation to be the most effective" said Professor Cole.

This unity of purpose is heralding an era of even greater cooperation between academia, government and the ICT industry which will further ensure that students achieve the best education in fundamental knowledge and skills and are able to integrate their learning with industry practices so that they graduate with broad real-world perspectives. Professor Cole observed that "Learning outcomes that include industry experience to make students highly employable will satisfy the most demanding of quality standards."