

Combatting Poor Perceptions of Teaching in ICT

To counter perceptions of poor quality teaching in ICT, and to further improve actual teaching performance, the Australian Council of Deans of ICT (ACDICT) has established the ACDICT Learning and Teaching Academy (ALTA).

ALTA was effectively launched at the Australasian Computer Education Conference (ACE) as part of the Australasian Computer Science Week Conferences at Curtin University, Perth, in January 2011.

Recognition of the need for ALTA arose from the first ever national ICT Learning and Teaching Forum for “the movers and shakers” in the ICT higher education community – the Associate Deans for Learning and Teaching or their equivalent. Under the auspices of ACDICT, the forum was held in Sydney over 2 days last July and was attended by 36 teaching staff from 25 universities. Industry representatives and Young IT members of the Australian Computer Society also participated to inform university teachers about preparing students for the workplace.

Outcomes of the 2-day forum included a far-reaching academic statement of the academic perspective on work integrated learning, methods for improving student engagement, and strategies for greater cooperation between universities in the area of learning and teaching. Further details can be found on the ACDICT website (<http://www.acdict.edu.au/>). The success of the forum so impressed the full Council of Deans of ICT at their Annual Council Meeting in September that they unanimously voted to establish and support ALTA.

A member of the ACDICT executive, Professor Janet Verbyla, Dean at the University of Southern Queensland, was given responsibility for the establishment of ALTA: “ALTA can contribute to the improvement in the perception of and the actual quality of learning and teaching across the ICT disciplines by sharing best practices through networking, collaboration and cooperation between university teaching staff”, she said.

Associate Professor Peter Cole, Dean at Murdoch and ACDICT President, commented that “the ICT community did not have a strong record in obtaining learning and teaching grants from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council to help improve teaching, and with ALTA financial and advisory support, university partnerships will improve this situation, particularly if the ALTC ceases to exist.” He added that “as revealed at the 2-day learning and teaching forum last July, exemplary things are happening in learning and teaching in ICT in many pockets and that they need to be exposed to the wider community to maximise the benefits.”

Dr John Hamer, a Senior Lecturer in computer science at the University of Auckland and an ACE 2011 conference co-chair, said that “The Australian initiative is laudable, and New Zealand will be watching this development with interest.”

Associate Professor Angela Carbone, a former winner of the Prime Minister’s Australian University Teacher of the Year Award, and involved with learning and teaching ICT at Monash, and a member of the Australasian Special Interest Group in Computer Science Education, said that “the establishment of ALTA will promote effective collective

approaches to ICT education by supporting the culture of good learning and teaching and providing a focal point for the development and dissemination of best practices.”

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