



# Australian Council of Deans of ICT

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## Senator the Hon Chris Evans

Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations  
Leader of the Government in the Senate  
[senator.evans@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.evans@aph.gov.au)

27 February 2012

Dear Senator Evans,

### Base Funding Review Report Response from ACDICT

I am writing to you as President of The Australian Council of Deans of Information and Communications Technology (ACDICT, <http://www.acdict.edu.au>), ACDICT is the peak body representing the many academic disciplines comprising Information and Communications Technology (ICT) within Australian universities, such as,

- Computer Science
- Information Systems
- Information Technology
- Software Engineering
- Electronic Engineering
- Computer Systems Engineering
- Telecommunications Engineering
- and any other ICT related discipline.

ACDICT welcomes the Government's on-going efforts to ensure a stronger and more sustainable higher education funding system in order to address national participation and professional workforce needs. ACDICT agrees that the base funding model should be characterised by clarity, efficacy, equity and transparency.

As stated in a number of the principles and recommendations, this particular review needs to be seen as a starting point for a more in-depth analysis of and deliberations on a range of considerations. ACDICT would anticipate contributing to these further considerations; particularly, with respect to the relative cost of education across disciplines, supporting industry placements, ensuring equity of access, addressing workforce needs and ensuring quality while supporting innovation in education in which ICT has an increasingly key role.

ACDICT would argue that the parameters of the future base funding model should not be based on the outcomes of past practice; disciplines have inevitably evolved teaching practices that reflect the level of funding afforded by historic patterns of funding support and practice. A more simple and transparent base funding model could be established on the identification of common teaching modes and then the extra costs of learning and teaching, such as laboratory work, clinical practice, work integrated learning or agricultural fieldwork.

ICT is driving a significant narrowing of the core educational practices across disciplines as evident in the major trend to dry (computer simulated) laboratories. ACDICT believes that there is a need and opportunity to better align base funding model with this development by reducing the relativities between disciplines by recognising all disciplines need funding to support the ICT-supported education experience which is increasingly common regardless of discipline; this would effectively

increase the funding value of the lowest relativity. This value would then be enhanced by a surcharge applied (to reflect additional costs) when students undertake more specific disciplinary activities that are required for sound pedagogical and professional reasons not just because in some disciplines past funding patterns has permitted it.

ACDICT is acutely aware of the distortion of the cost of teaching caused by the current historic discipline based relativities. The list of disciplines comprising ICT (such as given above) are scattered across the current and the indicative new clusters; ranging through 'computing' which sits with a "menagerie" of disciplines such as mathematics, visual and performing arts, and nursing (group 3 of 5), to Information Systems as an academic component of economics and commerce (group 1 of 5) to Software Engineering, be found in Engineering (group 4 of 5). Students enrolled in any of these ICT "flavours" tend to have common courses (with very similar educational experiences) that span the funding range from clusters 1–4.

From the student perspective this issue of ICT-lead convergence of educational approaches means that a fair student financial contribution to their higher education is problematic. The proposed 40:60 sharing of costs that differ widely across the five indicative new clusters would not appear to be fair and equitable when most students have the same sort of teaching experience for most of the time regardless of the cluster.

ACDICT is unable to detect in the review documentation the actual justification for the 40:60 ratio and would like to see that addressed; a different ratio such as 30:70 might have more justification given the return in taxes alone from "private gain". Furthermore, while some fixed proportion might be a target for the overall contributions to funding, ACDICT would argue that a more fine grained approach needs to apply at the discipline level; this is for a number of reasons including workforce planning. This objective could be achieved by retaining but with more regular reviews, an appropriate formulation of the current three tier HECS table of "private gain" which does not appear to have engendered great resistance perhaps because of its alignment with social perceptions.

Finally while ACDICT fully supports the maintenance of the autonomy of universities in their internal funding distributions, ACDICT would argue that claims that certain disciplines are underfunded must entail scrutiny (acquittal) of how much of that is due to institutional budgetary practices along with unrealistic disciplinary aspirations. (All disciplines would like more funding.)

We look forward to further discussions with you about these important issues.

Yours sincerely



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