



A•S•U
Australian Services Union

ASU Submission
to the
ICT Workforce Issues Paper, January 2013

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Introduction

The Australian Services Union [ASU] is one of Australia's largest Unions, representing approximately 120,000 employees.

The ASU was created in 1993. It brought together three large unions – the Federated Clerks Union, the Municipal Officers Association and the Municipal Employees Union, as well as a number of smaller organisations representing social welfare workers, information technology workers and transport employees.

Today, the ASU's members work in a wide variety of industries and occupations and especially in the following industries and occupations:

- Local government (both blue and white collar employment)
- Social and community services
- Transport, including passenger air and rail transport, road, rail and air freight transport
- Clerical and administrative employees in commerce and industry generally
- Call centres
- Electricity generation, transmission and distribution
- Water industry
- Higher education (Queensland and SA)

The ASU has members in every State and Territory of Australia, as well as in most regional centres.

Overview

The ASU welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ICT Workforce Issues Paper. The ASU considers the issues paper as an excellent overview of the key issues facing the ICT Workforce and recognises ICT has played a significant role in contributing to innovation, economic growth and increased productivity in the last 50 years.

The ASU believes the issue paper could benefit further by taking a closer examination of the education needs of the ICT sector regarding the recent increase in VET fees. While this is within State and Territory jurisdictions, the Federal Government has a role in providing support for students when considering educational options.

Other key concerns to the ASU include the lack of secure work and the capacity for government (under the NBN or regular recruitment) to play a broader role in the long term development of ICT capacity.

ICT and Offshoring

Secure Jobs Secure Data is a joint campaign of the Australian Services Union (ASU) and the Finance Sector Union (FSU) focussed on the crisis facing professional services workers whose jobs are being outsourced and offshored at an alarming rate. The campaign is also concerned about the offshoring of Australian's sensitive personal data which follows the jobs going offshore, and how this affects our privacy and security.

There is evidence that offshoring trends are undermining investment in education and training.

The service sector is still the biggest employer of Australians, but growth has been most consistent in domestically-focussed, face-to-face service jobs. High-skill services jobs related to new technology are increasingly prone to offshoring with major occupations such as ICT workers (managerial, technical and support roles) being impacted.

With the loss of these high-skill jobs, there is the risk of becoming trapped in a vicious cycle of offshoring jobs, losing the skills related to those jobs, and thus losing that capacity within the economy.

The ASU believes we need a plan to secure ICT jobs of the future. Recommendations include: reviewing the use of tax incentives and disincentives to retain Australian jobs and competencies, introduce “right to know” legislation to allow consumers to find out where services are provided from and where their personal data is stored and develop a government procurement policy to only contract services to business with transparent supply chains and ethical employment practices.

Clearly it is important to keep ICT jobs in Australia. However, we should also be concerned with the security of ICT systems outsourced overseas, and of the privacy of Australians whose information may be kept on these systems.

Unfortunately, when ICT systems are outsourced it becomes much more difficult – and certainly much more expensive – to guarantee these security and privacy standards.

Key Questions from Issues Paper

How can education and training providers produce ‘work ready’ graduates?

It has been a long held belief by industry professional that ICT students should be ‘work ready’. As such Governments have made public funding for universities partially contingent upon graduate outcomes, with an emphasis on ‘work ready graduates’.

In its research paper the Curtin University of Technology stated the vocational education and training sector (VET) has taken a system-wide approach and embedded eight employability skills in all nationally recognised qualifications thus promoting ‘work ready graduates’.

The ASU is concerned that the recent changes to funding arrangements for VET have been accompanied by predictions of job losses in the TAFE sector, discontinuation of courses and even the closure of colleges. Such funding changes may dramatically impact the number of 'work ready' graduates in the future.

How can industry make career pathways to specialised ICT careers more transparent to prospective workers?

This paper clearly outlines the changes in the ICT industry, where secure work is much less available. Outsourcing and a lack of investment in training has contributed to increased casualisation and individual contracts. Both the industry and governments at all levels have roles to play in increasing the availability of long-term secure work. This would increase domestic capacity to meet future demand, and address the continual need for skills development.

What can be done to boost engagement in ICT apprenticeships and traineeships and to create more entry-level opportunities?

Across Australia, State governments have cut funding to TAFE, where significant numbers of ICT trainees and apprenticeships are completed. Urgent funding is needed to ensure that digital equity is not undermined, as high fees restrict access to the ICT industry to those that can afford it.

Government, at all three levels, also has a significant role to play in ensuring that ICT apprenticeships and traineeships are widely available. Within the roll-out of the NBN, there is also wide scope for the Federal Government to invest in the future of the ICT industry and ensure sufficient training positions are mandated in NBN contracts.

The new Victorian Technology Student Accelerator Voucher program for small to medium sized companies is an excellent example as to how to boost engagement in the ICT industry. It allows companies to adopt and develop new technologies with a Victorian university by providing a voucher that can be exchanged for goods, services, advice or expertise.

How important is skilled migration to meeting the needs of the ICT sector?

The ASU strongly believes the use of skilled migration should not be a substitute for properly investing in and training the ICT workforce. In the first instance skill development, support for higher level qualifications, support for training and retraining of the existing ICT workforce should be promoted.

What can be done to address the ICT industry's concerns regarding the retention of skilled workers?

The lack of secure, long-term work is a significant contributor to both the lack of diversity in the ICT workforce and retention issues. The industry cannot grow sustainably without investing in the ICT workforce over a longer timeframe. Governments again play a role in working with business through procurement practices to ensure that public work is conducted by industry who are investing in their workforce.

As can be seen in the ICT sector, a relatively high percentage of contract workers will be forced to take responsibility for their own skills development. There is a dangerous potential for companies to acquire new workers rather than provide upgrade training for current employees.

Retention of ICT employees is important. Advancement in the form of training and promotion plays an important role in retention.

What are the implications for the Australian ICT sector and workforce of the increasing globalisation of both the ICT sector and the ICT workforce?

Please refer to our section ICT and Offshoring above.