Addressing workforce challenges: diversity and gender issues in IT

Information Technology Professionals Association
– an APESMA special interest group

APESMA/ITPA position statement – July 2010
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80 per cent of IT Professionals are male and over half of IT Professionals are aged 25 to 39.
Insights into IT Professionals (Australia)
Manpower Market Insights Paper

Out of the 8,000 Indigenous students participating in tertiary studies in Australia during 2000, only 107 were enrolled in computer science programs.
Media release
Minister of Reconciliation and Aboriginal Affairs, 2001

To address shortages, we must look to members of groups currently under-represented within the (higher education) system.
Bradley Review of Higher Education

Background

What is APESMA? The Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers, Australia (APESMA) is an organisation registered under the Fair Work Act 2009 representing over 25,000 Professional Engineers, Professional Scientists, Veterinarians, Professional Surveyors, Architects, Pharmacists, Information Technology Professionals, Managers and Transport Industry Professionals throughout Australia. APESMA is the only industrial association representing exclusively the industrial and professional interests of these groups.

What is the ITPA? APESMA represents several thousand members working directly in Information Technology (IT) through its special interest group - the Information Technology Professionals Association (ITPA).

This document puts the APESMA/ITPA position on diversity and gender issues in IT.
Declining number of IT graduates and movement out of the IT profession impacts diversity

The number of young people graduating from a tertiary IT course has declined significantly over the last five years. Movement out of the profession alongside the declining number of IT graduates has resulted not only in an increasing shortfall of IT graduates available to industry but a lack of diversity in the IT workforce and differential rates of participation in IT employment. Women, mature-aged workers and indigenous Australians are among the groups who are underrepresented in the IT sector.

Australian data indicates that female participation in tertiary ICT courses fell from 26.2% in 1989 to 19% in 2000, with female representation in jobs involving ICT at 20%1. In 2004, ABS figures reported the proportion of women workers within the ICT industry as 16%, with only 3% of electronic and communication technicians being women. 2006 Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts figures indicated that boys outnumbered girls in post-school study in ICT by more than six to one.2

In relation to the under-utilisation of mature-aged workers, the Australian Computer Society 2010 survey - Improving Age Diversity in the ICT Workforce Report - detailed the widespread impact of age discrimination in the IT sector. The report found that Australia’s mature-age worker participation rate was below that of comparable countries such as Canada, United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States. The key factors in workplace discrimination against older workers included being less healthy or more prone to disability, being underqualified or having obsolete skills, unable to learn new skills, being over qualified, unable to adapt to new or younger work cultures, looking towards retirement so not worth training, resistant to change and less adaptive to new technologies.3

To broaden the national IT skills base, help address re-emerging IT skills shortages, and to address growing age, cultural and gender gaps, universities, business and government need to ensure they attract and retain groups underrepresented in IT to IT courses and employment.

Recommended measures

The ITPA is committed to addressing the economic and social impact of discrimination on the basis of age, gender and race in the IT sector by partnering with industry, business and other professional associations to further investigate discriminatory practices and support measures which will bring about attitudinal and institutional change. There are also a number of employment practices business and government as employers of IT professionals can implement to help attract, develop and retain their IT professionals. The ITPA also endorses putting in place the following mechanisms in the workplace where appropriate to maximise the attraction and retention of groups underrepresented in the IT workforce:
• Provide employment conditions which provide for work/life balance, for example, flexibility provisions, part-time work, parental leave, work from home options, paid maternity leave, job sharing
• Provide challenging work to facilitate job satisfaction
• Provide genuine opportunities and support for career advancement
• Provide appropriate rewards - salaries and other incentives
• Provide induction and training following a career break
• Provide access to professional development opportunities to support career advancement
• Provide for phased retirement
• Provide for cadetships or similar which combine training and employment including short to medium-term international project engagements where possible
• Provide role models and in-house skills development via mentoring including reverse mentoring to leverage young professionals' ICT skills
• Encourage business and government to invest in training existing staff, particularly in areas of shortage such as project management
• Encourage IT professionals including women to take up post-graduate education, particularly in areas of shortage
• Where a restructuring process occurs, ensure that it does not impact differentially on particular groups
• Consider professionals with diverse backgrounds for promotion and Executive and Board positions

2 James Cook University’s research project into women and girls in ICT data, http://www.neilrobertanderson.com/girlsict/current%20research.html, retrieved 19.4.2010