SENATE
FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
REFERENCES COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO
RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING IN THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC
SERVICE

Submission No. 49

Submittor: Australian Computer Society
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AUSTRALIAN COMPUTER SOCIETY

16th September 2002

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Senator Michael Forshaw
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Forshaw:

Re : Australian Public Service (APS) Recruitment and Training

The Australian Computer Society (ACS) wishes to thank you for inviting us to make a submission to the related inquiry.

As the recognised association for Information Technology (IT) professionals, the ACS attracts a large and active membership (over 16,000) from all levels of the IT industry. It provides a wide range of services to its members. A member of the Australian Council of Professions, the ACS is the public voice of the IT profession, the guardian of professional ethics and standards in the IT industry, with a commitment to the wider community to ensure the beneficial use of IT.

Attached please find our written submission and it is for your reference. Should you have any questions, please let us know.

Thank you for your attention and we wish you a productive inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

DENNIS FURINI
Chief Executive

Encl.: a/s
Cc: Erika Kerruish

Advancing IT Professionals

Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee
An inquiry into Australian Public Service (APS) Recruitment and Training

Submission from the Australian Computer Society (ACS)

Introduction

The Chair of the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee, Senator Michael Forshaw, announced on 22 March 2002 plans to conduct an inquiry into the Australian Public Service (APS). This covers recruitment and training, employment and career opportunities for young people; and training and career development opportunities for APS employees in regional areas.

The Australian Computer Society (ACS) is the recognised association for Information Technology (IT) professionals, attracting a large and active membership (over 16,000) from all levels of the IT industry. It provides a wide range of services to its members. A member of the Australian Council of Professions, the ACS is the public voice of the IT profession, the guardian of professional ethics and standards in the IT industry, with a commitment to the wider community to ensure the beneficial use of IT.

This submission represents some of the Society's views and opinions on the issues of recruitment and training of public servants, especially those involved in the practice of IT.

Recommendations

1. The Committee should consider establishing recruitment guidelines for IT professionals with appropriate qualifications, working experience and undertaking. These guidelines should include the ACS Core Body of Knowledge, Code of Ethics as well as its Code of Professional Conduct and Professional Practice;

2. The Committee should consider the findings of the ACS Remuneration Survey when reviewing the pay scales of APS IT employees;

3. For non-IT APS employees who are required to demonstrate competency in the use of personal computers, the Committee should consider using the International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) as a reference and benchmark.

4. As the discipline of IT is dynamic and fast changing, IT professionals must keep their knowledge current. The APS should consider structured programs such as the ACS Certification and Practising Computer Professional schemes to help its IT professionals maintain their level of competence.

5. The Public Sector is by its nature highly dependent on IT, which offers an ideal opportunity for on-the-job experience for young IT graduates. Young

people, in general, have a strong inclination to advance IT skills in real life and provide a good source of workers keen to adopt technology in the work place. The Committee should consider the feasibility of a more structured apprenticeship/technology adoption scheme both in IT and non-IT departments.

6.   While we recognise that training and career development opportunities for APS employees in regional areas are important, the Society recommends the Committee consider general PC competency as a core skill set for regional employees for its potential to increase productivity. The Society also believes it is important to enhance the skill sets of APS IT employees to improve the implementation of IT-related projects. This is particularly important in regional areas since they sometimes have difficulties accessing certain IT skill sets compared to their urban competitors.

Australian Computer Society

The Australian Computer Society (ACS) is the professional association for the IT industry with branch offices in all states and territories and a Membership of over 16,000 IT practitioners committed to its Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct and Professional Practice.

ACS members enjoy many benefits, including assistance in keeping their knowledge up-to-date in a rapidly changing environment, gaining practical new skills, exploring ideas and concepts, participating in peer group activities, extending their network of professional contacts and other value added benefits including a range of discount schemes.

On 1 January 2000, the ACS became the first IT body in the world to achieve full professional status in its own right with its acceptance into the Australian Council of Professions (ACP). This means that IT practitioners can now be recognised by other "peer" professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, architects, accountants and engineers, as sharing compatible "special" knowledge, ethnical standards and behaviour.

Establishing Recruitment Guidelines for IT Professionals

While IT is widely practised in today's work environment, it remains a relatively young discipline with an enormous breadth and depth of knowledge and skill. In the interest of the larger community and to advance the professional practice of IT in both the public and public sectors, the ACS believes it is important that practitioners acquire appropriate qualifications, working experience and understanding. These guidelines should include:

1. Core Body of Knowledge

The 'Core Body of Knowledge'[1] established by the ACS is recognised as the Australian Body of Knowledge for IT professionals. It is used as a guide to assist in the process of assessing applications for Membership of the ACS, for tertiary course accreditation and for assessing applications for migration to Australia. It also provides guidance for course design and implementation, and is a vital component with respect to pending legislation in professional standards.

The areas of knowledge identified as currently constituting the Core Body of Knowledge include Computer Organisation and Architecture, Conceptual Modeling, Database Management, Data Communications and Networks, Data Structures and Algorithms, Discrete Mathematics, Ethics/Social Implications/Professional Practice, Interpersonal Communications, Program Design and Implementation, Project Management and Quality Assurance Security, Software Engineering and Methodologies, Systems Analysis and Design and Systems Software.

This Core Body of Knowledge is reviewed and monitored by the Membership Board of the Society.

2. Code of Ethics

The ACS has developed a Code of Ethics[2] to provide its members with authoritative guidance on acceptable standards of professional conduct and practice within the IT industry.

The value and ideals subscribed to by ACS Members cover priorities, competence, honesty, social implications, professional development and integrity.

The Society's Code of Ethics is accepted by the Council of Professions as the standard for the IT industry.

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[1] Details of Core Body of Knowledge can be found at www.acs.org.au/national/pospaper/bokpt1.htm
[2] Details of Code of Ethics can be found at www.acs.org.au/national/acsregs.htm#4

3. Core of Professional Conduct and Professional Practice

The Society's Code of Professional Conduct and Professional Practice[3] is designed to provide members with authoritative guidance on acceptable standards of professional conduct and practice within the IT industry. The Code focuses on essential matters and is not intended to include a multitude of detailed rules.

The Code is divided into two main sections - the Code of Professional Conduct and the Code of Professional Practice.

The Code of Professional Conduct is aimed specifically at individual IT professionals and is intended as a guideline for acceptable personal conduct for each IT professional practising in the industry. It applies to all IT professionals regardless of their role or specific area of expertise.

The Code of Professional Practice is intended as a guideline for acceptable methods of practice within the IT industry. Because of the rapidly changing nature of the IT industry and the wide variation in roles, this section of the Code is deliberately generic and concentrates on common areas encountered in the industry that are not influenced by hardware, software or organisation type.

ACS Salary Survey as a Reference of Related APS Employees

The 2002 Australian Computer Society Remuneration Survey found that average salaries paid to ICT professionals rose by an average of four per cent over the 12 months to May 2002, down from an average of 5.1 per cent the previous year.

This is the lowest increase recorded since the survey was first conducted in 1995, and the first time the growth rate for ICT salaries was lower than the annual increase in Average Weekly Earnings (AWE), recorded at 5.9 per cent for the same period.

Salary increases were higher for ICT professionals working in the private sector (4.2 per cent), compared to a 3.5 per cent rise for those in public sector jobs. It is also interesting to note that the total package paid within the private sector is higher than the public sector in all levels except level 1 positions.

A comparative study should also be recommended in order to find out more about:
a.   The variation in total packages between APS IT employees and their counterparts in the private sectors and any trends that can be identified in relation to this; and
b.   If variations exist, how these might compare with other jobs within the APS system.

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[3] Details of the ACS Core Body of Knowledge can be found at www.acs.org.au/static/national/pospaper/code2.htm

It is recommended that the APS use the findings of the ACS Remuneration Survey as a guide when reviewing the pay scales of APS IT employees.

International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL) as a Benchmark Reference for non-IT Employees

The International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL)[5] is a competency standard endorsed by the Australian Computer Society. The ICDL is the standard for basic computer literacy in over 57 countries. The ICDL is not a professional qualification, but is a standard for people in business and all walks of life who use a PC.

The ICDL is not a "training course" but rather a competency standard that is acknowledged through testing. It is based on the successful European Computer Driving Licence scheme (ECDL). The ICDL program is governed by the ECDL Foundation in over 40 member countries including Australia and the USA.

The ICDL provides a simple and reliable means of identifying computer competencies of both existing employees and future job applicants. By adopting the ICDL as a standard for all non-IT employees, an employer can ensure consistent and desired levels of IT ability throughout the organisation.

Structured Program to Keep Knowledge Current

IT is a dynamic and fast changing discipline. Special effort and resources should be deployed to ensure IT employees keep their knowledge and skill sets current to enable maximum productivity gain in operations.

The Society has two structured programs that contribute to achieving this goal.

1. Certification Program

The ACS Certification Program[6] aims to offer high quality and ongoing professional development, IT and business knowledge that is current and relevant. It provides an opportunity to test professional skills against a defined benchmark, recognises up-to-date skills and knowledge, as well as the ability to work ethically in the IT profession and add value to an organisation.

The Program was established in 1993 and is an industry based, masters level course of study comprising four one-semester modules. It is delivered by distance education and can be completed part-time within two years. Examinations are conducted by Deakin University in 95 cities throughout Australia and 33 cities in the Asia Pacific region.

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[5] Details of International Computer Driving Licence can be found at www.acs.org.au/icdl
[6] Details of Certification Program can be found at www.acs.org.au/certification

2. Practising Computer Professional (PCP) Scheme

ACS members have a professional obligation to themselves, their employers and the community to maintain their skills and knowledge through ongoing professional development. The ACS has formalised this obligation with its Practising Computer Professional (PCP) Program[7]. PCP activities help members perform their job to the best of their abilities by extending their knowledge and skills.

The PCP Program recognises members who have completed 30 hours of approved professional development in any one year. It allows for educational activities that deal with new knowledge and skills in IT as well as the acquisition or improvement of interpersonal skills and general business skills.

Feasibility Study of Structured Apprenticeship/Technology Adoption Scheme

The Public Sector has always been a major IT employer and is by its nature very IT-dependent.

It requires specific IT skill sets for certain job functions and duties that many private firms do not cover. The Public Sector offers an ideal opportunity for on-the-job experience for young IT graduates to help them build the core body of knowledge required for today's IT professionals.

IT graduates could also provide a resource to help non-IT APS employees adopt IT more efficiently within the work place.

The Committee should consider the feasibility of a more structured apprenticeship/technology adoption scheme both in IT and non-IT departments.

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[7] Details of the Practising Computer Professional Program can be found at www.acs.org.au/training/pcpprog.htm

Online Training and IT Career Development Opportunities for APS Employees in Regional Areas

The use of online training for staff development should be further encouraged in appropriate subjects and this online training should include IT skills.

The Society also believes it is important to enhance the skill sets of APS IT employees to improve the implementation of IT-related projects. This is particularly important in regional areas since they sometimes have difficulties accessing certain IT skill sets compared to their urban competitors.

Conclusion

The Society welcomes the inquiry and requests that the Committee consider the recommendations made in this submission.

Appendix I: List of Attachments

1. ACS Information brochure

2. The Core Body of Knowledge for Information Technology Professionals

3. ACS Code of Ethics

4. ACS Code of Professional Conduct and Professional Practice

5. ACS Certification Program

6. International Computer Driving Licence

7. Information Age

8. Supplement in the Tuesday Australian (15 Feb., 2000)

* Further copies of attachment are available, if required. Please call Lourdes at (02) 9299 3666.