

# IT Digest

## Volume 7

### Summary for August 2006

#### The Australian Tuesday 1 August 2006

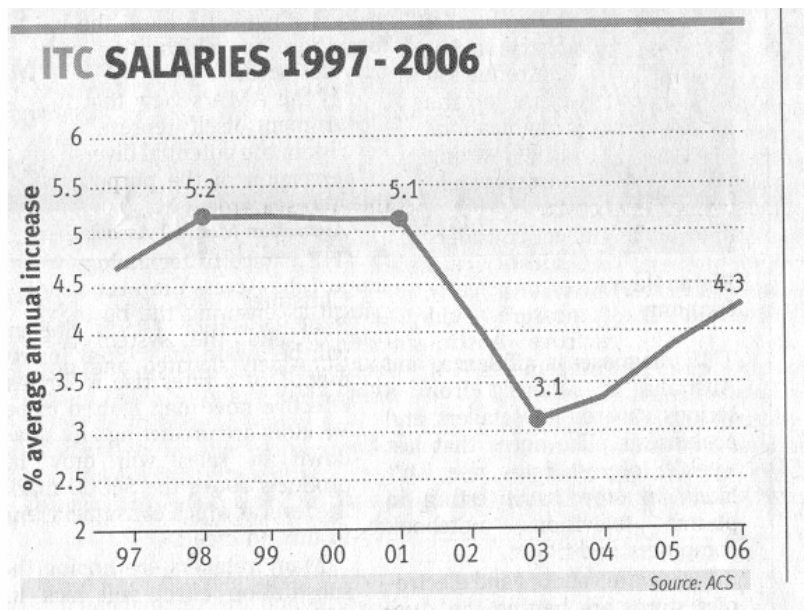
##### Playing academic games

Parents who believe their children's interest in computer games is unlikely to help their future career might do well to discuss the matter with Queensland University of Technology undergraduate studies director Ruth Christie. The university will next year take in its first students for a newly created Bachelor of Games and Interactive Entertainment. "As the industry grows, so is the demand for qualified and skilled employees who have the artistic talent and technological know how to help the industry," Christie says. "This new degree will give students a huge head start in getting their foot in the door of the games industry, but it will also open up career prospects in other industries." Recent research by the Australian Game Developers Association shows that Australia's electronic games industry earns more than \$100 million a year in exports and employs more than 1000 people. Christie says that workforce is expected to double over the next five years.

#### The Australian Tuesday 8 August 2006

##### Techies' pay keeping up with the rest

Salary increases for information and communication technologists are bubbling along at the same rate as wage rises for most Australian workers. The Australian Computer Society's annual remuneration survey shows that technology wages increased on



average by 4.3 per cent in the 12 months to May. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for the 12 months to February show that average Australian weekly earnings increased by 4.4 per cent.

### **Local Canon lab building up staff**

Canon research group CISRA is expanding because of increasing demand for its work. It is planning to take on up to 15 new scientists, programmers and engineers over the next few months. Canon Information Systems Research Australia (CISRA) is one of the imaging company's three pure-research labs outside Japan. Director Phil Robertson says CISRA has thrived because it has managed to commercialise so much of its work. CISRA has had difficulty attracting the right kind of recruits and was limited in what it could do "by the availability of staff". While CISRA is not known for making its researchers rich, staff are attracted for other reasons. CISRA focuses on image processing and print rendering, and some of the technology developed in Sydney is used in Canon products worldwide. They are also working on advanced systems such as ways to secure printing, log-on and faxing.

### **Tech jobs lift beats the rest**

The information technology and telecommunications job market outperformed the national average last month, according to the Olivier employment report. IT is the third-largest occupation category after sales and marketing. Last month, there were 24,165 IT & T related jobs on the main job board, compared with about 20,000 for accounting, the sector that formerly held third place. By occupation type, network, communication and security positions increased by 12.26 per cent in the past month. Database development, administration and instruction, training and writing were flat.

## **The Australian Wednesday 9 August 2006**

### **Over-citation puts integrity under cloud**

The integrity of Australian academic research is at risk from a growing fetish for higher citation counts as universities gear up for the research quality framework. "What is coming through very, very clearly is that people are manipulating citations", said Colin Steele, an expert on scholarly communication. The culprits were publishers, academics and "by implication, vice-chancellors," he said. Manipulative techniques ranged from a subtle shift whereby journal editors chose to run more review articles, which are highly cited, to claims that "citation clubs" of authors conspire to cross-reference on another, Mr Steels said. Citation counts have begun to feature more often on the CVs of Australian academics while university media offices now routinely publicise "hot papers" by staff counted as highly cited researchers by multinational publishers such as Thomson ISI.

## **The Australian Tuesday 22 August 2006**

### **National fight for staff**

Just 10 years ago there were seven people for every job vacancy in Australia. Now there are only three. And the ICT sector is leading the way, wages are spiraling up as demand increases and the pool dwindles.

Finding technology-skilled staff, and then keeping them, is becoming an increasingly expensive and frustrating exercise, particularly in the public sector's headquarters, Canberra. The federal Government has massive projects in train, (including the \$1

billion access card) and other agencies, such as Centrelink, have just released massive RFTs (requests for tender) for new work worth hundreds of millions of dollars.



According to the latest Olivier employment report, the ICT job market outperformed the national average last month. Advertised IT&T vacancies rose by 3.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 2.2 per cent for the whole job market. In the past year IT&T vacancies grew 41.7 per cent compared with a national average of 38.1 per cent.

Only sales and marketing are larger occupation categories.

In Canberra, government departments and their contractors are so desperate for workers they are poaching staff from other agencies. Budget funding for large scale projects will come under increasing pressure as competition for experienced IT staff dries up the resource pool and drives up salaries and contract rates, says Nardia Allison-Nichol, Ambition Technology's government portfolio manager. Centrelink, and the Departments of Immigration and Workplace Relations are all competing for a similar range of IT skills, Allison-Nichol says.

National manager for Candle ICT Jane Bianchini says there is an ever-increasing number of ICT positions up for grabs across the country, most notably with Immigration, Centrelink and Defence. Immigration alone needs 200 people for its \$495 million systems upgrade, and there are reports IBM is finding it tough to source the staff, although both the department and IBM say they are confident they will be found.

The Tax Office is also feeling the technology skills squeeze, with the agency trying to find Siebel resources for its mainframe project. Immigration is also using Siebel for its new case management system. A massive ICT project in NSW will only add to the increasingly desperate efforts by governments and their contractors to find staff, as it is likely to entice workers back to Sydney. The NSW government's People First strategy, a four year plan, could have a "significant impact", says Allison-Nichol. The project, which involves the mass consolidation of back-office administrative computing systems across the state government, involves around 100 independent projects.

### **Ericsson to pump \$5.4 m into NICTA**

Australia's peak commercial ICT incubator's research into next-generation wireless networks is poised to receive a \$5.4 million boost. The federally funded group, National ICT Australia (NICTA), has entered into a research venture with mobile equipment giant Ericsson initially valued at \$2.7 million. However, NICTA research laboratory director Aruna Seneviratne said there was potential to double the value of the research within two years.

### **Xbox tries to steal PS3's thunder**

Microsoft plans to clear a path to Christmas for its Xbox 360 console with a heavy bombardment from more than 100 new game titles set for release before the festive season. Standing in Microsoft's way will be a brand new PlayStation, the new Wii console from Nintendo and industry skepticism about game publishers' ability to release so many new games. There will be at least 160 Xbox 360 titles available in time for Christmas, well up on the 43 or so available now.

### **ICT career subsidies start**

The Queensland Government has opened applications for the first round of grants to fund initiatives that promote ICT as a career of choice. The program is aimed at helping industry organizations to undertake career promotion activities. Eligible organizations can apply for funding between \$10,000 and \$25,000 in each round. The funding package was announced in late June at the National ICT Skills Summit in Brisbane. There will be four rounds of funding over the next two financial years. Activities that comply with funding requirements include promoting ICT as an exciting and rewarding industry and as a career and educational pathway, and conducting ICT career events or holding "schools of excellence" through tertiary education institutions.

## **The Australian Wednesday 23 August 2006**

### **Bishop cold on ARC fee proposal**

Federal Education, Science and Training Minister Julie Bishop has vetoed any use of application fees to discourage the rapid growth in applications for Australian Research Council grants. ARC executive director Peter Hoj said the growth in Discovery grant applications – which rose 8 per cent to 4045 this year – was a "freight train coming". He said it was already getting harder to find enough reviewers to vet applications. Competition from the expert panels of the proposed research quality framework would make this ever more difficult. He has floated an application fee of

“several thousand dollars” or a cap on the number of applications from any one institution as possible ways to keep the peer review system manageable. But yesterday Ms Bishop ruled out any such changes to how the application process was run and she specifically rejected the idea of an application fee. The rise in applications for Discovery grants indicates the success of the program and the important role these grants play in supporting research in this country. The strong competition for these grants is evidence of the esteem with which the grants are regarded. But Ms Bishop left open the possibility of the ARC reintroducing a first-round cull of applications, the reform preferred by deputy vice-chancellors for research who spoke to the *HES*.

