

Question on Notice
No. 404
Asked on 28 March 2006

MS STONE asked the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs (MR CUMMINS) —

QUESTION:

With reference to skill development in the ICT industry —

- (1) What is the State Government doing to assist Queenslanders to gain the right skills for this industry?
- (2) What are Logan ICT leaders doing to promote and improve skill development?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Springwood for her question and for her ongoing support for the information and communication technology (ICT) industry.

Following a significant downturn in business investment in ICT after the Y2K period (year 2000 programming problem) we are starting to witness the first real increase nationally in ICT project expenditure in many years. However, this increase in business ICT investment is occurring in the context of declining enrolments in Information Technology courses. Our economic performance both nationally and in Queensland is going to be significantly affected unless we address this imbalance.

To address this situation, Queensland government agencies have been working on initiatives to resolve the potential looming shortage of skilled workers for the ICT industry.

Over the last twelve months Education Queensland has been working tirelessly on their Smart Classrooms Strategy. They have formed a number of partnerships with the ICT industry to deliver a short term industry placement program for teachers. This program aims to improve teachers' appreciation of how ICT can improve the delivery of subjects, not just ICT subjects, taught in our schools. Education Queensland has also established an ICT Innovation Learning Centre at the Sunshine Coast University. This world class education facility offers both teachers and students hands-on access to hardware and software so that they can fully experience the tangible benefits of ICT.

A considerable body of research exists to indicate just how influential teachers are in shaping students' attitudes to career choices. These two initiatives will play an important role in redressing the decline in ICT university enrolments in coming years.

The Honourable the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and Minister for Sport recently launched the Queensland Skills Plan. This plan outlined significant changes to the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. One of the most important changes is to ensure that courses are more relevant to both students and employers. This plan is particularly relevant to the dynamic ICT industry which is constantly changing. The skills plan provides the platform to enable ICT VET courses to better reflect the needs of employers for job-ready employees.

The Queensland Government has also shown national leadership by announcing that it will host a National ICT Skills Summit on 21 and 22 June 2006. The summit will bring together industry, education and government representatives to address both current and future ICT skill requirements and, importantly, canvass stakeholder agreement on possible initiatives to address looming skills shortages and consolidate work currently addressing the image of the ICT industry and career path structures.

The ICT skills shortage needs action both nationally and locally. As you are aware in Logan City, the recently formed Logan IT Group is attempting to address this issue by forging stronger links between local companies and local education providers.

The Logan IT Group is working closely with Griffith University to provide industry-based placements for third-year ICT students within local businesses. This provides the students with invaluable work experience.

The Group is also working with the University to help improve enrolments in ICT courses by local secondary students.

Last year the Group, together with the Logan City Office of Economic Development, organised an education day for local secondary school students and career advisors, providing information on the full scope of job opportunities in ICT and career paths.

A vibrant and growing ICT industry is vital to the economic development of Queensland. ICT is one of our truly global industries. It is the enabler that underpins productivity improvement in almost all industry sectors and delivery of our critical infrastructure. ICT represents an exciting and rewarding career for young people. Our challenge is to connect with the younger generation and to once again stimulate their interest in an ICT career. The Government is working with industry and education and training providers to create the platform for this change.