INTRODUCTION

The Australian Computer Society (ACS) is the recognised association for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) professionals, attracting a large and active membership from all levels of the ICT industry. A member of the Australian Council of Professions, the ACS is the public voice of the ICT profession and the guardian of professional ethics and standards in the ICT industry, with a commitment to the wider community to ensure the beneficial use of ICT.

ACS members work in all areas of business and industry, government and academia, and are qualified and experienced ICT professionals committed to the Society's Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct and Professional Practice. ACS membership denotes a commitment to professionalism. The ACS has around 17,000 members. Approximately 15.5 per cent are female\(^1\).

BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The ICT sector in Australia is characterised by a relatively young, ethnically diverse and male dominated workforce. The total ICT workforce in Australia is approximately 532,500\(^2\). In January 2008 there were an estimated 79,000 women employed in the ICT industry in Australia, with almost half working in the software and services sector.\(^3\) Within the ICT sector, women account for just under 30 per cent of the total workforce. Female participation rates in ICT roles are around 21 per cent at the professional level, 18 per cent when electronics and communications workers are included, and the rate drops to 15 per cent when all the relevant trades assistants are included.

The median age of the ICT workforce is 39.8 years. In some sectors of the industry approximately 80 per cent of the workforce is under 40 years of age.

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\(^1\) The ACS membership statistics September 2009  
\(^2\) The 2009 ICT Statistical Compendium  
THEME 3: WORKPLACE PROGRAMS, REPORTING AND COMPLIANCE

In developing this submission, the ACS has limited its comments to the section of the Issues Paper on Workplace Programs, Reporting and Compliance. ACS has based its comments and observations on various surveys of ACS members undertaken over the past 12 months or so and on the data collected for the ACS ICT Statistical Compendium released in August 2009.

ACS W Survey and Statistical Data

The perceived lack of data about the actual needs, experiences and challenges of women in the Australian ICT sector prompted the ACS Women’s Board (ACS-W) to undertake a survey of all female members of the ACS.

The survey was conducted in June 2008 and highlighted a number of dominant themes as common issues for the majority of respondents.

The survey found that:

- some women in the Australian ICT industry receive less remuneration for equivalent work;
- there are fewer opportunities for challenging work and promotion for women; and
- there is less recognition of the value of women than their male counterparts.

The factors that members thought contributed to these inequities included:

- the predominance of males in the ICT sector;
- traditional views of gender;
- the higher value placed on men within the industry; and
- differences between men and women in their approach to salary negotiations.

Of interest, the ACS Employment Survey 2009\(^4\) found that around 34 per cent of women had experienced discrimination on the basis of their gender.

These issues are discussed below.

Remuneration

According to the 2009 ACS Remuneration Survey, women employed in the ICT sector receive significantly less salary than men for equivalent roles/experience.

The gender pay gap is experienced by most women irrespective of their age, their experience and their qualifications.

Upon commencing their career the mean total salary package for a male staff member with less than three years experience is $64,010. The commencing salary package for a woman with equivalent qualifications and experience is $61,264.

At the other end of the career continuum, the mean salary package for men with 35 years (or more) of experience is $145,143, while for women with 35 years (or more) of experience the mean package is $129,4245.

This salary inequity was also reflected in the results of the ACS-W Survey which indicated that, while 70 per cent of the women reported that they receive equal remuneration, the remainder did not believe they had access to the same level of remuneration as their male colleagues. To illustrate, women reported that:

“Equivalent male salaries average 20 per cent higher for same level and output of work.”

“A male member of my team who reports to me is on a higher salary level.”

“I took over from the previous IT manager (3 years ago) and I am still payed at least $10,000 less than he was at the time of leaving.”

“There is a girl in our IT Department who has not had a pay review in 6 years. However her male colleagues have all had pay reviews, pay increases and offers of other forms of remuneration.”

“When the AWA’s were handed out, the men were given more money and more perks by the national manager.”

Gender differences were believed to influence the salary negotiation process. It was reported that women were more reluctant to ask for a salary increase, whereas male employees were perceived to be more proactive. Typical comments include:

“Women are not so skilled in salary/packaging negotiations and not as confident in their abilities.”

“Women aren’t as aggressive as men in negotiations.”

**Male-dominated Working Culture**

Not surprisingly, most of the women in the survey reported that the Australian ICT sector is predominantly male and this is reflected in the workplace culture and senior management positions. For example:

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5 APESMA. 2009 Australian Computer Society Remuneration Survey Response Report, p.33
“Very male dominated workforce- most of the senior executive, board and senior managers are male.”

“All males except two in a staff of about forty are in a management role. The remainder are female staff “assistants” except one who is a manager.”

“Women are not holding major positions in many organizations.”

“Promotions are more likely to go to males.”

As a result of the gender imbalance and the predominantly male culture, many women reported not receiving the same opportunities, promotions and recognition as their male counterparts and feeling less valued. For example, one member who had worked overseas in a senior management role stated that:

“I found it very difficult to get a job of a similar calibre-whether this was from being away too long or being female I am not sure, but the end result was taking a demotion to middle management. It was, however, curious that I was runner-up to a male for five different senior management IT jobs (after a long process with multiple interviews for each position).”

Some women believed that some organisations and managers perceive men to be more valuable, reliable and knowledgeable and more technically competent.

Members reported that male managers frequently gave the more challenging and interesting work to male colleagues. As a result of these opportunities, male colleagues were more likely to receive a pay rise or promotion.

CONCLUSION

While 70 per cent of the women surveyed did not consider themselves discriminated against in the workplace, it is of major concern that 30 per cent did. This discrimination encompasses remuneration, perception of value, opportunity for promotion and to undertake the more exciting roles and gender.

This level of perceived discrimination has also been reflected in the ACS employment survey over the last couple of years. In 2007, female respondents reported a level of 27.8% sexual discrimination, but in 2009 this percentage had grown back to 34%, nearly the level reported in 2006.

In the 21st Century many women believe the battle for equity has been won, this would appear to be incorrect. The ACS employment and remuneration surveys and its 2008 survey of female members, suggests that many organisations in the ICT industry are not providing women with equal opportunities or equal remuneration for the same level of work in comparison to their male counterparts.
In the absence of a comparison with other professions, it appears that women may be at a particular disadvantage when they work in a male-dominated profession such as is the case for the ICT sector.

This suggests more education and introduction of processes that achieve greater transparency of remuneration decisions and equity in promotion and hiring policies is required when it comes to women working in the ICT industry.