The Information Industries Strategy and Librarianship

What is the IIS?

Librarians will be very interested in the Information Industries Strategy (IIS) released in September 1987 by the Minister for Industry, Technology and Commerce, Senator John Button. In his introduction to the IIS Senator Button observed that:

There is no doubt that the information industries are critical to the overall development of Australian industry. Products like communications equipment, electronic components, computer hardware and software, are a vital part of a modern, sophisticated and efficient economy. Their application provides a foundation for increased productivity, flexibility and efficiency across a wide range of industries.

But more than this, the information industries provide substantial opportunities for Australia to take part in the rapid growth in world trade of high-value-added products and services. These industries have the potential to contribute significantly to Australia's export income.

The Strategy, which is the result of a long process of discussion and consultation with industry, aims to maximise our chances of exploiting our unique opportunities in these industries while they are within our reach.

The vital role of skills

The major aim of the IIS is thus to boost the performance and competitiveness — particularly international competitiveness — of Australian information industries.

The IIS identifies longstanding shortages in key professional and sub-professional skills as the greatest single obstacle to achieving the strategy's targets of enhanced export growth and product development. To address the obstacle the Government proposes to:

(a) substantially increased 1988 intakes into undergraduate courses in electronic engineering, computer science and other relevant disciplines;

(b) accord a high priority in future years to further increase intakes, the extent of which is to be determined after consultation between the relevant Ministers;

(c) establish an Information Industries Training Foundation (IITF), for a period of three years, to identify specific skills shortages and facilitate the development of short courses and in-house training to rectify those shortages;

(d) examine ways of upgrading the existing skills of workers, students and teachers;

(e) review ways by which state authorities could increase the number of secondary and tertiary teachers working in information-related disciplines and allow teachers to upgrade their skills in the light of rapidly changing technologies.

Elsewhere the IIS states, under the heading, 'Skills: the Vital Ingredient', that:

The skills we need are in electronic engineering, computer programming, system analysis and related skills production, and communications engineering.

Australia must at least double it stock of electronic engineers and computer scientists in the next ten years.
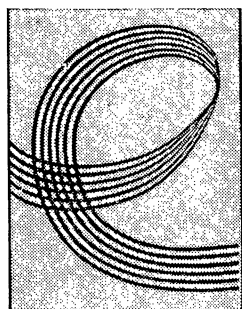
Role of librarians

Librarians clearly have a very important role to play in helping to meet the objectives of the IIS because of their unique information-based skills. However, if the library profession does not take advantage of the challenges and opportunities presented by initiatives such as the IIS, it may well be by-passed or permitted to play only a marginal role in the processes transforming society through the so-called information revolution. The profession should certainly ensure that librarianship is one of the 'relevant disciplines' considered worthy of increased tertiary intakes and provide input into the deliberations of the IITF (See (c) of IIS proposals).

Recommendation

As a qualified librarian and scientist I strongly urge librarians to obtain copies of the IIS and also to keep abreast of developments in information and communications technologies and relevant government policy initiatives. Copies of the IIS and of recent DITAC (Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce) reports on key communication technologies can be obtained by phoning me at the Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce on (062) 76 1864. I also have available the consultant's brief for a major current study into Australia's information and communications services which may be of interest.

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