



ICT industry must present positive image to ensure the right output of third-level graduates

As Europe moves towards becoming a knowledge economy, member states and employers must ensure that the ICT industry is attractive to graduates. Too often there is a “boom or bust” notion of ICT and this can either attract too many people to the industry or discourage people from pursuing such careers. These are the findings of a study carried out by a consortium composed of CEPIS, the Manchester Institute of Innovation Research (formerly PREST) and Eurochambres.

Research shows that by 2010 we may be facing a future with a potential annual shortfall of 70,000 skilled ICT practitioners across the EU. State policymakers and the ICT industry must work together to attract people to ICT courses and subsequent professional careers.

Unforeseen swings of interest in ICT can leave the skills market short of qualified people – it is when the market recovers that it is in most need of a specialist workforce. There is a time lag between study and qualification. It is of limited use to respond to a take-off in an industrial sector while it happens – it requires years for policies to be drafted and implemented, and years again for educational courses to be devised and filled. So educational “output” must be wooed in advance if the potential annual demand for 250,000 ICT professionals is to be met by 2010.

To tackle the potential shortage of graduates of skilled ICT professionals, the research group recommends the following joint actions and strategies for the industry and policymakers:

- **Cultivation of a positive public image of the ICT industry.** State and industry must work to attract people to study computer science-related courses and pursue ICT careers. Positive coverage of ICT activity and active recruitment drives must do more than counteract “bad news” such as redundancies. The industry must be portrayed as dynamic and rewarding, exciting and desirable. Students must understand it is the market environment when they graduate that counts.
- **Concentration on the quality aspects of skill shortages, not just the quantity.** The ICT industry needs skills elites and people with the right level of excellence.
- **Reduction of mismatches between university and industry.** More collaborative work is required between the two. Bridges should be built between ICT industry-based certifications and formal education and vocational training courses. At the same time, students should not be moulded just for the workplace.

People take up computing courses for reasons such as personal interest, career path and response to national educational strategies. As with all fields, their decision to follow



such syllabuses is influenced by the availability of courses, perceived job satisfaction and security, levels of remuneration and their response to the overall image of the ICT industry.

In times of boom, people are enthusiastic about commencing and completing computer qualifications. The dot.com boom attracted people with its seemingly endless creativity, mobility and financial reward. Preparation for the “Y2K bug” and the computer implications of adopting the euro all captured the imagination and drew people into ICT. However, the bursting of the dot.com bubble in 2000 slowed the race into ICT and made people more reluctant to embark on specific courses of study. This left a shadow over the industry and it is vital that sufficient positive news is provided and that positive actions are taken to counteract this negative memory.

ICT Workforce

Europe’s ICT market is worth in excess of €500 billion per year and employs four million people, with the software and IT sector alone accounting for 2.8 million workers. In the decade to 2005, 1.7 million of these jobs were created. Any shortage in the supply of ICT professionals would limit the sector’s development.

Authors: Matthew Dixon, PREST, Eurochambres
Council of European Professional Informatics Societies
Avenue Roger Vandendriessche 18
B1150 Brussels - Belgium
email: fanning@cepis.org
<http://www.cepis.org>

Tel +32 (0)2 772 1836
Fax +32 (0)2 646 3032

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