



*Advancing IT through Education and Research*

**Media Release : Tuesday 7 June 2005**

## **Industry fights technology skills drought**

THIRTY-FIVE Victorian students will receive IT scholarships tonight as part of a massive industry push to deliver skilled graduates.

The Australian Computer Society Foundation (ACS Foundation) scholarships are backed by 40 Victorian donors including the Victorian Government, IBM, Agilent, ACER Computers, Deakin University and Motorola.

Nationally, the ACS Foundation has provided 400 scholarships worth almost \$6 million since its inception in 2001. About 40% of recipients have been women, with 140 large and small ICT organisations providing sponsorship.

ACS Foundation Executive Director John Ridge said the organisation was formed four years ago amid concerns universities could further improve delivering work-ready graduates with relevant industry skills and knowledge.

Mr Ridge said students had been turned off technology careers in the early 2000s partly due to concerns over job opportunities, with ICT enrolments falling 25-40% and some universities slashing their ICT academic staff.

“We are on a downward spiral in the nation’s capacity to produce new IT professionals. We’re going to see a shortage of quality graduates in the coming years,” Mr Ridge said.

“The industry is looking at ways to address the looming shortage to ensure they gain access to the number and quality of graduates they need in a tighter market,” he said.

“If we can’t get high quality students back into IT now we’ll be facing a skills drought with far reaching ramifications, not just for our industry but for all those that rely on IT.”

Mr Ridge said the Victorian Government had been a strong backer.

“The Victorian government through ICT Minister Marsha Thomson has been the most supportive of all Australian governments. We thank the Minister for her support, as do the 97 Victorian students who have directly benefited from scholarships since 2001.”

Minister for Information and Communication Technology Marsha Thomson said: "The Bracks Government recognises that one of the strengths of ICT in Victoria is the large number of high quality graduates available to enter the industry. The promotion of ICT careers is an important issue and we are therefore proud to support the activities of the ACS Foundation."

Most of the ACS Foundation scholarships to be awarded tonight are Work-Integrated Learning Scholarships, where a donor organisation mentors the student and provides a work placement to ensure he or she is job ready on completion of their degree.

"ICT employers ideally want to hire people with experience in the workforce," Mr Ridge said.

"The foundation's Work-Integrated Learning Scholarships address this requirement by combining a three year ICT-related degree with up to a year of industry-based work placement with a donor organisation. "

RMIT research has found students achieve demonstrably higher grades after a year of industry placement. Pro-active employers are now directing substantial resources to Work-Integrated Learning Scholarships and the ACS Foundation expects to offer a further 200-300 scholarships in 2006.

"This will help the IT sector attract and retain very best and brightest and talented students, meeting growing demand from employers for graduate staff."

The ACS Foundation also offers a *Grow a Graduate* program.

"Donors can tell us the gender, geographic location and specific skill set they expect industry to need in coming years. We identify appropriate institutions and courses, and encourage suitable applicants," Mr Ridge said.

"There are huge opportunities for women, particularly in regional areas, through this program."

## **FOR INTERVIEWS CONTACT: Michelle Edmunds 0413 120 342**

**Victorian donors:** ACS Victorian Branch, ACER Computers, Agilent, Barwon Health, City of Greater Geelong, Deakin Prime, Department of Education and Training, Dimension Data, eProgram, GAMAA, G-Force Recruitment, Godfrey Hurst, IBM, Motorola, Radiant Systems, RMIT, Deakin School of Information Systems, Deakin School of Information Technology, Deakin Information Technology Services, Sun Microsystems, Target Australia, Telstra Countrywide.

**About the ACS Foundation:** An initiative of the Australian Computer Society, the ACS Foundation was established in August 2001 to encourage both private and public sponsorship of IT higher education and research projects. By increasing funding opportunities for industry to contribute to education programs, the Foundation seeks to create a highly skilled workforce, able to effectively access research and industry-specific training. The only national scholarship facilitator focused exclusively on the IT industry, the ACS Foundation receives funding from IT companies, industry associations, Government bodies, individuals and the ACS itself. [www.acsfoundation.com.au](http://www.acsfoundation.com.au)