



Diversity and inclusion

ACS foundational public policy position

Version: 1.0, 20 Feb 2022



Purpose

ACS foundational public policy positions are designed to act as guides for ACS' government, industry and media engagement.

These are the guidelines and goals for ACS in different domains, covering ACS' beliefs, principles and broad public policy goals. These will inform our work with government, media and industry and provide a baseline for ACS to work from.

These positions are created in consultation with our members and advisory boards, and are subject to change over time as conditions change.

Contents

Purpose.....	2
1. Preamble.....	3
2. Principles	5
2.1. Legislation and policy	5
2.2. Education	5
2.3. Workforce	6
2.4. Research	7
2.5. Measurement and reporting	8



1. Preamble

The ACS believes that a diverse and inclusive Australian Information Technology (IT) sector is vital for the health, productivity and success of the nation's digital economy and global relevance, now and into the future.

It is said that diversity is the 'what' and inclusion is the 'how.' A diverse workforce is one that is fully representative of the different traits that comprise our society. A diverse workforce refers inclusively but is not limited to gender (male and female identifying, non-binary and intersex), sexuality, sex, race/ethnicity, indigenous culture, ages, religions, neurodiversity, physical abilities and disabilities.

Many groups are underrepresented in the IT sector, some severely—for example, women have made up less than 30 per cent of the IT workforce for several decades, and the recent ABS statistics show that the number of Indigenous-identifying ICT specialists in Australia continues to be low. The ACS believes that without a diverse and inclusive workforce, the Australian technology sector and the wider digital economy will increasingly suffer from a deficit of employees, qualifications, talent, skills, knowledge, ideas, perspectives and experiences.

An inclusive IT sector is one in which all participants are not only treated fairly and respectfully regardless of their diverse traits, but have equal access to opportunities, resources and conditions that enable them to participate fully and successfully. Without inclusive IT education and workplace cultures, practices and conditions, underrepresented groups in society will continue to face a range of discriminatory factors which inhibit their entry into the technology sector and their opportunity to participate in developing the digital technology solutions on which Australian business increasingly relies and where new sources of wealth are generated. Barriers to participation in the digital economy constrain or harm individuals as well as organisations and, over time, society more broadly.

By strategically and systematically fostering diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the IT sector, the ACS believes the Australian government will help to mitigate technology and digital labour and skill shortages, while enabling individuals, organisations and the wider economy to reap the many benefits that have been found to accrue from more diverse and inclusive workforces and cultures, including improved financial returns, innovation revenues, organisational productivity and national prosperity. An IT sector that is more attractive to and



welcoming of currently underrepresented groups will become a stronger, more innovative and respected contributor to business, the national economy, and the digital future.



2. Principles

2.1. Legislation and policy

1. **The Australian government should ensure that both consumer and business technology legislation reflect our industry's and society's expectations for diversity and inclusion in the digital era.**

The ACS celebrates the immense economic and social benefits of IT, particularly emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, human-computer interaction and quantum computing. ACS also recognises the risk some technological developments may pose to individuals, industry sectors and/or groups in society and their potential to further entrench discrimination, wage insecurity and disparity of access and opportunity. ACS supports legislative reform or new legislation that continues to ensure fair, safe and equitable technology use and access and participation in the digital economy.

- a) Government should consult widely and inclusively on legislation, with mechanisms to seek out and act on independent advice from the technology sector and peak bodies.
 - b) Legislators and regulators should apply a D&I perspective and fully consider the impacts of new laws, modified laws and regulatory compliance on all sections of business and society.
2. **The government should develop a cohesive policy framework, including financial and non-financial incentives, to increase the diversity and inclusiveness of the IT sector and build a robust national digital capability and capacity.**
 - a) The government should make incentives such as wage subsidies, tax incentives, childcare subsidies and training incentives (eg. apprenticeship programs) available to help overcome both the current and future labour and skill shortages in the technology sector.
 - b) The policy framework should include support for industry to provide non-financial incentives, programs, initiatives and practices to attract underrepresented groups to engage with technology and/or join the IT workforce.

2.2. Education

1. **The Australian government, industry and education sector should collaborate on the development of a national strategy designed to increase the participation of underrepresented groups in primary, secondary and tertiary technology and digital education.**

Longitudinal data demonstrates the underrepresentation of women and other groups in society at all levels of formal technology and digital education, with no clear indicators of significant or timely improvement on the horizon. Therefore, the ACS believes that a formal education strategy is required to actively address entrenched disparities. The strategy should:



- a) identify key constraints that inhibit sustained participation in technology and digital education by underrepresented groups
 - b) identify curricula to support Australia's industry and national economic priorities
 - c) articulate curriculum objectives to overcome constraints and enable sustained participation by underrepresented groups in technology and digital education over the long term
 - d) include an implementation roadmap with target KPIs and dates
 - e) nominate agencies with responsibility for strategy and curriculum design, implementation and progress reporting.
2. **Government and industry should collaborate on a public education campaign to specifically address discriminatory stereotypes and views about the IT sector and working in IT.**

The ACS is of the view that persistent stereotypes and biases about the IT sector and workforce reinforce notions about who should and should not work in IT, and subtly but powerfully influence people who do not fit the stereotype to self-select out of a career in the sector. Therefore, the ACS believes government, media and industry should collaborate on government-sponsored public information campaigns to improve the sector's profile and appeal by:

- a) raising awareness and acceptance in all parts of the Australian community that the technology sector is a viable and attractive career option for anyone
- b) promoting awareness of the significant organisational, innovation and economic benefits of having a diverse and inclusive technology and digital sector.

2.3. Workforce

1. **The government should provide strategic funding for IT sector D&I programs specifically designed to support industry's ever-increasing need for existing and new technology and digital labour and skills.**
2. **All technology companies in Australia employing 50 or more staff should have an explicit diversity and inclusion (D&I) strategy and program.**

The ACS believes that talking generally about 'culture' in the industry or dealing with individual examples of discrimination are inadequate responses to systemic D&I issues and will not effect change at the scale required. Therefore, formal programs as detailed in our report *Implementing Diversity and Inclusion - A Reference Guide*¹, should be implemented in every technology company of medium size or larger. D&I programs should be more than public relations exercises – they should meaningfully address culture, hiring and promotion policies and practices, workplace conditions and opportunities to achieve diversity and inclusion.

¹ <https://www.acs.org.au/insightsandpublications/reports-publications/diversity-and-inclusion-reference-guide.html>



For technology organisations employing under 50 staff, including technology start-ups, the government should introduce taxation benefits and other financial incentives for specific D&I KPIs to encourage the establishment of diverse and inclusive technology workforces in small to medium organisations.

3. **The Australian government and industry should seek 40 per cent representation of women² in technology professions by 2030 and parity with men by 2040.**

ACS firmly believes that parity of women and men in the Australian IT workforce is both appropriate to properly reflect the makeup of the Australian population and also achievable by 2040 with the right interventions.

Achievement of this goal may also improve intersectional participation of other underrepresented demographic traits and, as a tangible and achievable goal for one marker of diversity, may also serve to encourage broader and deeper D&I interventions for other underrepresented groups.

To that end, government and industry should work towards increasing the number of women taking up technology opportunities in education and the workforce.

- a) Government should provide assistance in the form of community building and mentoring programs that support women looking to get into technology roles – both young women looking to take their first career step, and older women looking to reskill.
- b) The education sector should provide appropriate curricula, scholarships or positive inclusion programs that encourage girls, young women, and older women to study digital and technology subjects.
- c) Government-funded awareness and recruitment campaigns targeting women should be developed in consultation with education, media and industry sectors.
- d) Industry should be supported and funded to create positive inclusion and affirmative action programs that remove barriers for women to enter and/or remain in the technology workforce.

2.4. Research

1. **The government should fund a range of pure and applied research into diversity and inclusion (D&I) in technology organisations, the IT sector and the national digital economy.**

The ACS believes that a comprehensive body of empirical, objective research is key to understanding the full organisational, economic and societal impacts of discrimination; determining how to best solve systemic barriers to underrepresentation in the IT workforce; and informing development of robust legislation and policy.

² The term 'women' refers inclusively to cisgendered, trans-women and women-identifying individuals.



Research outputs based on evidence and hard data will enable the formulation of 'best practice' D&I strategy for the IT sector that results in increased sector effectiveness and broader industry, economic and societal value.

2.5. Measurement and reporting

- 1. The government should enhance and extend current diversity measurement and reporting regimes or systems to specifically capture diversity data and report on D&I in the technology workforce.**

ACS recognises that what is not measured cannot be effectively managed, and therefore is of the view that the data currently available on the diversity of Australia's technology workforce and IT sector is not sufficient to inform the development of D&I policies, programs and practices to solve systemic issues of underrepresentation and discrimination.

To this end, those agencies and organisations currently supported by government to gather, analyse and report on D&I data should be supported to extend their regimens and systems to include data on the diversity characteristics of technology/digital teams or roles within organisations. Reporting on technology teams and roles D&I should become mandatory for all organisations employing 50 or more staff.