

CIRCIT — a focus for research on communication and information

The *Australian* (24 July) ran the headline 'CIRCIT out to prove its critics wrong'. What is CIRCIT, and what were the criticisms?

CIRCIT (The Centre for International Research on Communication and Information Technologies) is an independent research institution which began its operations from plush offices overlooking the Yarra on 1st July last year. 'Academic rivalry and the distinction of being a Victorian government initiative have proved tough hurdles', says the *Australian*. CIRCIT will get \$3 million a year for the next 5 years, at a time when universities are being starved of funds.

Its high profile is deliberate: 'We don't want to be seen as a university-type research centre'. And one of its research staff has stressed that it is providing independent research at the right time. 'Academic research institutions nearly always address issues after the event.'

CIRCIT plans to perform and promote basic and applied research on:

- *The Information Economy*

The implications of communication and information technologies for growth and development in the global information

economy and in specific industry sectors. Attention will be focused on issues of economic theory and measurement; the economics of information; innovation, diffusion and technology transfer; the spatial and distributional implications of development.

- *The Telecommunication Infrastructure*
The increasing significance and changing role of the telecommunication sector for national and global markets generally, for international competitiveness, and for achieving local, national and international policy objectives.

- *Content and Communication*

The increasing significance and changing character of information content and communication networks — ranging from broadcasting, libraries and international databases to the human-machine interface and specialised communication networks — with particular attention to the increasing commodification of information and the growth of information markets.

- *Organisational Structure*

Implications of the changing structure and design of organisations of all kinds — commercial, governmental, labour, educational, et cetera — and for the decision-making processes generally.

- *Employment and Training*

Implications for the changing nature of employment and work, ranging from local skill requirements to the international

division of labour, including training, education and the changing role of trade unions in the information economy.

- *Policy Analysis and Assessment*

Implications of both explicit and implicit policies, regulations and laws for the course of human, economic and social development, including the role of policy research in the processes of policymaking.

Its charter requires it to become pre-eminent in the study, research and education on the economic, social and public policy implications of information and communication technologies. In support of this it will undertake original research, disseminate its results, collaborate with institutions with similar interests and establish a leading international library and documentation centre in the field.

Its Director is Professor William Melody, the founding Director of the UK Program on Information and Communication Technologies (PICT). Deputy Director is Professor Don Lamberon, formerly with the U of Q and well known to us for his writings on the economics of information.

CIRCIT has had some initial successes with studies on AUSSAT and on telecommunications laws, and is seeking to attract corporate sponsorship to replace the government funding. At this stage it seems that those criticisms rest on a slender foundation and will soon be forgotten. ★

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