CAUDIT'S ANNUAL
2013 TOP TEN ISSUES

CAUDIT Members meet annually to workshop various issues that are affecting their individual institutions. What emerges from these discussions is a national trend and a Top Ten list of the most significant areas of interest.

1. SUPPORTING AND ENABLING RESEARCH

The support needs of researchers are different from those of more traditional corporate or business users, often requiring the use of bespoke systems or software. In addition, research is becoming increasingly collaborative and through federally-funded programs like the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS), researchers are requiring access to shared instruments and utilizing shared services in their research.

This shift has exposed a need for a more integrated set of Information Technology (IT) support services for researchers that by necessity involves traditional IT departments. At the same time, advances in technology that supports high performance computing and visualization are increasing at an unprecedented pace.

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2. SUPPORTING AND ENABLING TEACHING AND LEARNING

Technology has become a pervasive element of the education experience for all students. Traditionally, Universities have used technologies like Blackboard, Desire2Learn and Moodle. As the recent hype around MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) has demonstrated, innovations in technology can have a disruptive influence and far ranging effects.

Enabling learning and teaching goes beyond Learning Management Systems (LMS) with technology integral to deploying effective learning spaces and the flipped classroom, however, technology plays a key role in enabling effective learning spaces and the flipped classroom. IT has a key role to play as a partner to assist the Learning and Teaching community to implement technology and foster innovation.

3. POSITIONING IT AS A CATALYST AND USING ANALYTICS TO TRANSFORM THE BUSINESS FUNCTIONS AT THE INSTITUTION

IT plays an important role in systems underpinning the core business processes of the institution, albeit as a service provider. IT also has significant potential to drive innovation to transform business processes and support learning, teaching and research. Innovation and transformation come with inherent risks with few IT leaders granted a remit to encourage this. The development of trusted relationships with senior leaders, key stakeholders and the broader community allows IT to be viewed as a trusted partner that can act as a catalyst for transformation.

Institutions hold a considerable amount of data about their operations that is underutilised. There is an increasing imperative to use data and business intelligence tools to support decision-making. Operationally, data analytics can inform and guide the decisions of University leaders to improve efficiency and measure and demonstrate value. The use of analytics can also help institutions build predictive models to highlight at-risk students and enable early intervention – leading to greater student retention and completion.

4. LEVERAGING CLOUD SERVICES IN A COORDINATED AND STRATEGIC MANNER

High quality cloud-based services are now broadly available. The scale of global commercial markets allow the provision of convenient, functional services that exceed those that could be sustainably provided by internal IT departments. To support their work or research activities universities use these services, either free or by payment of a nominal fee.

Cloud services present challenges for the institution not immediately visible to an individual professional or academic staff member. IT Leaders need to consider data sovereignty, performance, policy and legislation that can present very real challenges to the leadership of the institution. Hidden costs also need to be considered.

Institutions will not be able to ignore cloud services, nor will they be able to effectively mandate staff to use a particular service. IT Leaders will need to develop strategic partnerships with cloud providers either individually or through aggregated arrangements to deliver relevant services, as well as educate and guide professional staff and academics.

5. FUNDING IT TO EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT THE STRATEGIC MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY

Universities Australia reported decisions by the Federal Government in 2012 had wiped almost $1B off forward estimates for research funding in Higher Education. A further 2% ($900M) efficiency dividend was subsequently announced in April 2013. Universities will be expected to reduce costs by 2% in 2014 and 1.25% in 2015. At the same time, analysis of CAUDIT benchmarking data revealed that across Australia and New Zealand, spending on IT had fallen by 4% between 2010 and 2011, mostly as a result of budget cuts.

IT leaders report that they are under continuing pressure to operate more efficiently and deliver savings. Whilst many acknowledge that IT is a key enabler underpinning administration, learning, teaching and research, there remains a continuing perception that IT is a cost centre, rather than a key strategic investment.

IT Leaders need to engage with senior leadership to change these perceptions. They need to deliver IT services clearly aligned to the mission of the institution with strong systems in place clearly demonstrating to university management the value and contribution that IT makes.

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6. MANAGING SECURITY AND PRIVACY IN A HYBRID ENVIRONMENT OF MULTIPLE SOURCING MODELS

Cyber-attacks are increasingly sophisticated and motivated by a desire to access data held by Universities with potential commercial value. Universities are also attractive targets for third-party attacks via high-speed research and education networks. The increasing use of personal devices, cloud services and alternative-sourcing models has led to a more complex security and privacy environment.

Universities are under increasing compliance demands and the reputation damage that can result from breaches can be significant. IT Leaders need to ensure adequate measures are in place without any additional or overburdening demands on staff and students.
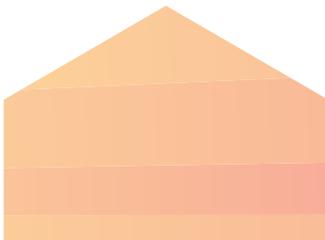
7. ATTRACTING AND RETAINING IT STAFF AND PREPARING THEM FOR A VERY DIFFERENT (NEAR) FUTURE

Graduation rates of IT professionals in Australia and New Zealand have declined coinciding with a sizable cohort of IT professionals nearing the end of their careers. During October-December 2012, a shortage of 4,600 IT professionals existed in Australia. Universities are operating in an environment of increased competition for qualified IT staff and tightening budgets.

At the same time, core IT offerings are moving to third-party vendors and cloud providers. Student and staff e-mail is one such example, with almost every institution in Australia and New Zealand now using cloud-based services. This represents the beginning of a trend towards attractive, commoditised service offerings.

IT leaders will need to implement new and innovative strategies to attract IT professionals, focus on retaining existing high-quality staff and implement practical workforce transformation strategies recognizing and addressing the changes needed in skill sets.

# 8. DEVELOPING A "DIGITAL STRATEGY" FOR THE FUTURE

The explosion of MOOCs in the higher education space has created considerable hype, but underlying that is a trend for greater consumer choice in the delivery of education. As commercial entities unencumbered by traditional models enter the space, Universities will face increased pressure to react to those trends and compete in a global education marketplace.

Many Universities will need to consider what their digital strategy might be, including identifying key components and how they work together. IT leaders have a key role to play in partnership with the Learning and Teaching community to chart a digital strategy ensuring the institution remains relevant and competitive.

9. ENSURING UNIVERSITY SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

IT forms part of the core infrastructure supporting the business of the institution. Increasing the use of technology to deliver education is just one of many examples of the important role that IT now plays. Students and staff demand access to University resources at times outside of traditional operating hours. The next cohort of students have grown up in an environment with 24 x 7 access to the Internet, leading to very high expectations about what a university should provide as part of their university experience.

IT is operating under increasing pressure to cut costs and is insufficiently funded to deliver on student expectations. IT leaders need to develop innovative strategies, including collaborative arrangements with partners, to ensure their services are available when students and staff need them.
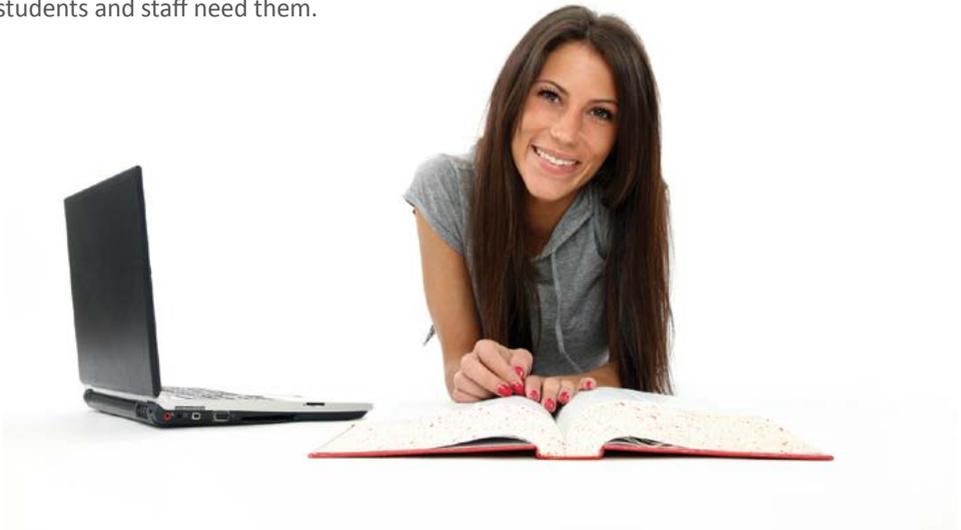
10. CREATING EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES ALIGNING WITH THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF THE UNIVERSITY

Across Australia and New Zealand, IT represents a significant investment of 6-7% of institutional revenue. Senior university leaders expect IT governance structures and processes ensure IT resourcing decisions are closely aligned with the strategic direction of the institution and that value for money is achieved.

Sound governance becomes even more important, particularly in an increasingly more complex environment with increased reliance on technology to deliver strategic objectives. IT leaders must create and operate effective governance structures and practices to support coordinated decision making regarding the acquisition and deployment of technology, software and services to achieve university strategic goals.
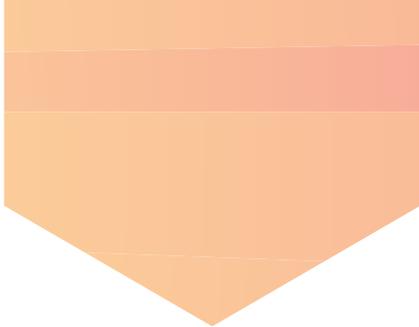
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