

## **Women to taste the top in shadow pilot**

*Rachel Lebihan*

The Australian Technology Network of universities is partnering industry and government to give women in the workforce a taste of different leadership styles and development opportunities in a bid to boost female executive numbers.

The Leadership Shadowing Program spans the five ATN member universities – Curtin University of Technology, RMIT, Queensland University of Technology, the University of South Australia, and University of Technology, Sydney – as well as Victoria Police, CSIRO, Department of Defence, Engineers Australia, and the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers, Australia.

Eighteen rising female leaders will partner women in the upper echelons of another organisation under a pilot program to start this month.

ATN executive director Vicki Thomson said the initiative was a response to the continued under-representation of women at senior levels in higher education, a situation Australia shares with the international university community.

"In Australian universities women comprise 41 per cent of academic staff and 63 per cent of non-academic staff. However, only 19 per cent of professors and 38 per cent of non-academic senior managers in Australian universities are women," Ms Thomson said. "This program aims to increase retention of senior women, to aid their progression and to provide the opportunity for stakeholder organisations to both learn from and to showcase their gender equity practices. Further, we would hope that by participating in this initiative the stakeholder organisations have the opportunity to garner some cultural as well as professional renewal and resilience."

It is also intended that participating organisations and universities will gain a broader understanding of how other sectors plan and implement policies and strategies to encourage more women into senior positions and to retain them once there.

Dianne Hardy, assistant director of the leadership division at Victoria Police Airlie Leadership Development Centre, said the police force had been tackling the issue of senior female participation for some time.

Women generally thought they had to do "everything brilliantly" before they put their hands up for more senior roles, and often "screen themselves out" of potential career opportunities.

The program would give women the opportunity "to reality check" what it was like to do a job at a more senior level. A number of executives from Victoria Police will be shadowed, including Jenny Peachey, director of corporate strategy and performance, Sandra Nicholson, an assistant commissioner.

Several senior sergeants will shadow executives at a university, including pro vic-chancellor and vice president of strategy and planning at the University of South Australia, Hilary Winchester.

Ms Hardy said cross-sectoral shadowing was valuable.

"What they do usually get from that is an appreciation of the similarities, which they often don't expect, and also a chance of looking at different ways of doing things," she said.

"It provides for innovative thinking and innovative practice."

It also expands networks and provides diversity of networks, which Ms Hardy said was important for anyone progressing their career. The Department of Defence will host two aspiring female leaders from RMIT.

Defence director general of the fairness and resolution branch, Di Harris, said if defence forces only compared themselves with each other, and not to other sectors, "it may lead you to do nothing". "I would be fascinated to know whether the issues for [universities] are the same. They may have overcome some of our issues and we may have solved some of theirs," Ms Harris said. "Looking at the same problem I'm sure there are some different strategies out there that might make a difference."

Women account for 13 per cent of the Australian Defence Force.

The program will run from August to October and shadowing will occur over a two-week period initially.

***Geographic area:***

*Australia*

*VIC*

***Classification:***

*Education/Tertiary Education/Universities*

*Population Groups/Women*

*Law/Police*

*Defence*

*Labour/Occupations/Management*