

Taking Women To The Top

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Despite many years of jawboning by governments, education institutions and industry about the need to attract more women into information and communications technology careers, women are walking away from the sector. Of Australia's 348,200 ICT workers in 2005-06, 85 per cent were men. The number of female ICT workers had fallen by 8 per cent over the previous year compared to a 6 per cent increase in male ICT workers. The Women in IT Executive Mentoring program is an attempt to turn these trends around and has made its first foray into the Commonwealth Public Service. Initiated by [Dell](#) three years ago in Sydney, it was driven by [Dell Australia](#) and New Zealand managing director Joe Kremer. "I thought this was a space where there wasn't a lot of activity and we could potentially lead in this space," he said at a graduation session in Canberra last week.

"I also happen to have two daughters who kinda like technology." The program takes a top-down approach, first recruiting senior ICT executives who are willing to be mentors. "If you agree, you can then nominate a high-potential female on your staff ... ," Kremer said. "Around the table are other [managing directors] and [chief information officers] you know and respect ..." Participants from nine Commonwealth agencies took part in the one- year program in Canberra, facilitated by mentoring consultancy Orijen and funded by [Dell](#) and agency contributions of \$1500 each. Two earlier groups based in Sydney involved chief information officers and female managers from major companies including Woolworths, [Westpac](#) and Deloitte, as well as the Australian Government Information Management Office and Centrelink. A South Australian group began the program earlier this year, mentor recruitment is underway in New Zealand, and groups are planned for Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. Kremer reckons everybody gains from their involvement. "When we survey the mentors we get very interesting feedback about how much they've learned and personally grown and improved their capabilities," he said. "The mentees report better access and quite a lot of them have been promoted. "Longer term, what we would hope to see is some of these people helping people lower in their organisation to move up..."