



MANAGING EDITOR: Ms Debra J. Brydon  
 DIRECTORS: Emeritus Professor Hedley Beare  
 Dr Richard Cotter, Associate Prof. David Beckett

# DIRECTIONS in Education

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## Rewarding Careers

*'THE Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers, Australia, has estimated 5,000 engineers are needed to fill vacancies in resources, infrastructure and defence' (Age, 24/2/07:2)*

*'The Graduate Careers Council of Australia has further spelt out the problem. Its Graduate Outlook Survey 2005/06 reports 37.1 per cent of employers had trouble sourcing engineering graduates, but in the construction and mining industries that figure leapt to 55 per cent' (ibid).*

*'Engineering graduates are now among the first employed and best-paid of all Australian university graduates' (ibid).*

*'Some employers are offering to repay HECS fees for engineering students. Companies are also offering cadetships to prospective employees while they are still at university. The students are offered holiday employment then full-time work when they graduate' (ibid).*

There are some who question the longevity of the current China-led resources boom. They point to past economic cycles and the need to watch the US economy for signs of an economic downturn. At US\$12 trillion dollars, the US economy is a colossus, and recession in America could, and possibly would, quickly infect the rest of the world. But China's economy, at US\$3 trillion dollars, continues to grow at, or near, a double digit rate. And then, of course, there is India and one or two other emerging economic giants. Some of our most respected miners, such as Chip Goodyear of BHP Billiton, say the current economic boom is quite different from those of the past, and will therefore likely last much longer.

If our economic boom proves different and more sustainable than those of the past, then the demand for engineers in this country will continue to outstrip supply. If, instead, we stand at the top of just another economic cycle then, when we plunge into recession, the young people currently swarming into fashionable tertiary courses such as business, commerce and psychology, may experience prolonged periods of unemployment in their chosen field. Australia, however, will continue to dig for minerals and it will take many years to replenish our depleted stock of qualified engineers. Young Australians would do well to consider engineering as a sustainable, as well as a rewarding, career path. More of them should contemplate senior secondary study programs in specialist mathematics, physics and chemistry.

*Mr Russell Boyle, education consultant, Victoria  
 Website: [www.russellboyle.com](http://www.russellboyle.com)*