This paper examines long term changes in the participation of women in professionally accredited computing degree programs. It reports on the results of three intensive Australia-wide studies of the situation in the mid 1980s, in 1992 and in the late 1990s. The early study painted a detailed and rather depressing picture of women’s representation in IT education. It also identified barriers to improvement in the discipline itself, the teaching institutions, and for individuals. The intervening years have seen many attempts to address these barriers in respect of both the attraction to and retention of women in IT courses. The current paper summarises the Australia wide studies and then draws upon recent localised data in contrasting environments and larger scale literature to explore how little things have changed as a result of these intervention programs.

Keywords: Computing education, women’s participation in IT


1. INTRODUCTION
There has long been concern at the shortage of IT graduates in Australia (Bennett and Kummerfeld, 1978; Bennett and Kay, 1981). Although there are many ways to address this, one important possibility is to ensure that women are well represented in the IT profession.

The Picture in 1986
In 1986, a CTEC funded study looked at women’s representation in professionally accredited computing courses (Kay, et al, 1986; 1989). At that stage, it captured a snapshot of courses which had a major role in educating programmers, analysts and other professionals with a high degree of computing skill. It surveyed all departments in Australian CAEs and Universities offering such courses.