

SECURING AUSTRALIA'S MATHEMATICAL WORKFORCE

By Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham

One of the biggest challenges Australia faces and a key focus of mine as Federal Education and Training Minister is ensuring Australians are getting the knowledge and skills to meet our present and future workforce needs.

With technology progressing at rapid knots, the changing nature of our industries and the fact that three in four of the fastest-growing occupations need skills in STEM it is more important than ever that we are building an agile and flexible workforce.

This is a key driver behind the Turnbull Government's National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA). NISA has a key focus on skilling our workforce for the future as well as playing a vital role in promoting co-investment and collaboration in research so that promising ideas come to fruition and deliver social and economic benefits to all Australians.

A demonstration of this is the Turnbull Government's ongoing collaboration with the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute (AMSI).

For example, the Turnbull Government is supporting the Securing Australia's Mathematical Workforce (SAMW) project which aims to secure a pipeline between universities and jobs in mathematical sciences. It seeks to inspire students in preparation for research careers and specialist roles in the industry, as well as contributing to their current studies and research projects.

The AMSI Summer and Winter Schools, funded under SAMW are also incredibly valuable in increasing the mathematics skills of participants through courses and lectures provided in collaboration with industry.

The Turnbull Government is also providing \$28.2 million to AMSI over four years to support 1400 new industry internships through a nationally expanded PhD industry internships program, with a particular focus on increasing female students' participation in STEM.

We know female participation in science and mathematics has declined and initiatives such as this are giving students more choice and opening up new career paths. These industry-based internships for PhD students provide work experience in commercial research environments and will enhance students' entrepreneurial skills and work-readiness.

We are also fully focused on boosting the number of Indigenous, regional, remote students undertaking STEM subjects. I recently launched 1200 new scholarships for regional and rural students to attract them to STEM university subjects to ultimately improve educational attainment, skills development, and employment opportunities for students from these areas.

We shouldn't lose sight of the value of investing in our youngest Australians when it comes to STEM interest. There is no doubt that the more engaged our youngest learners are in STEM, the better chance we have of leading them down pathways in these fields. That's why the Turnbull Government is also investing \$64 million in early childhood and school-level STEM programs to boost opportunities and participation in STEM subjects in our schools.

There is no doubt that our future workforce will look very different to what it does today, but together with organisations like AMSI we are working hard to ensure this generation and the next have the skills they need to succeed in the future. □



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