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Innovation: code-cracking contest to stir student potential

SID MAHER | THE AUSTRALIAN | DECEMBER 8, 2015 12:00AM



Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute director Geoff Prince. 'This investment is critical as we seek to rewrite the traditional narrative.'

Malcolm Turnbull will launch a national code-cracking computing competition for students in years four to 12 as part of a strategy to boost the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

The innovation statement committed \$51 million over five years to help Australian students embrace the digital age. These included online computing challenges for years five and seven students and information and communications technology summer schools for targeted groups of year nine and 10 students.

The government also promised expert help for teachers to enable them to implement the digital technologies agenda.

Mr Turnbull said the government was going to focus on talent and skills, "training our students for the jobs of the future and ensuring that we attract the world's best innovative talent to Australia".

The government's innovation policy also promised more support for Australian students in competitions such as the International Science and Mathematics Olympiads and hosting the 2019 Asian Physics Olympiad. This was part of a separate \$48m commitment over five years to boost interest in STEM subjects.

The policy also calls for development of play-based learning apps and science and mathematics resources for early childhood educators to engage preschoolers in STEM.

The government is pushing science, maths and technology because 75 per cent of the fastest growing industries require STEM skills.

The head of education at accounting firm KPMG, Elise Wherry, said highly developed STEM skills would be required not only to deliver the research and technology that Australia would need to compete in the future global economy, but also to tackle the challenges Australia faced around natural resource management, a changing urban environment and sustainable growth.

"Taking a student-centred approach to learning is going to be essential. This involves tailoring education to individual needs throughout a student's educational lifecycle," she said.

"The advent of new and exciting technologies like 3D printing and accessible robotics provide new inroads to tap into the intrinsic motivation of young people to experiment and explore. This inspirational subject matter needs to be delivered through inspirational teaching methods."


Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute director Geoff Prince said the \$99m investment in STEM education would deliver a much-needed boost to digital literacy and education outcomes in mathematics, science, technology and engineering.

He praised a \$13m commitment to increase participation of women in research, as well as STEM and start-up industries. “This investment is critical as we seek to rewrite the traditional narrative underscoring career planning for girls and encourage greater pursuit of higher-level mathematics and STEM studies.”

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