




Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham

Minister for Education and Training
Senator for South Australia

Our Ref MC15-003922

Dr Dennis Jensen MP
Chair – Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

9 DEC 2015

Dear Dr Jensen 

Thank you for your letter of 7 September 2015 to the Hon Christopher Pyne MP, the former Minister for Education and Training, concerning a recent petition on increasing science in the Australian Curriculum. As the matter you have raised now falls within my portfolio responsibilities as Minister for Education and Training, your letter was referred to me for response. I apologise for the delay in responding.

The Australian Government places a high priority on restoring the focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education in our schools. I believe that igniting an interest in STEM subjects at the school level is the best way to ensure that we increase the number of students taking up these subjects in higher education and in their future careers.

At the 29 May 2015 Council of Australian Governments' Education Council meeting Minister Pyne raised the issue of making senior secondary mathematics and science compulsory. The proposal was not supported by states and territories.

At the 18 September 2015 Education Council meeting, the Council endorsed the revised Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum for Science. The science curriculum provides opportunities for students to develop an understanding of important science concepts and processes, the practices used to develop scientific knowledge, science's contribution to our culture and society, and its applications in our lives. It provides an understanding of scientific inquiry methods, a foundation of knowledge across the disciplines of science, and develops an ability to communicate scientific understanding and uses evidence to solve problems and make evidence-based decisions.

At that meeting all Australian education ministers also agreed on the scope for the proposed national STEM school education strategy, framed by a focus on the long-term outcomes for students. The strategy is in response to the Chief Scientist's 2014 report *Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: Australia's Future*. The strategy will seek to build on the momentum of the significant number of STEM in education initiatives and programmes currently underway or planned for at the national, state and local levels. A key focus of the strategy is to ensure that Australian students are equipped with the necessary STEM-related skills, knowledge and interest that they will need to succeed in the rapidly changing world beyond the school gates. A draft strategy will be presented to the Education Council for consideration by the end of 2015.

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While the Commonwealth provides leadership in areas of national priority, state and territory education authorities have primary responsibility for education in their jurisdictions. Ultimately, any decision to mandate particular subjects at certain year levels, or the amount of hours that students must spend studying them, will be a matter for state and territory education ministers and authorities.

Thank you for bringing this matter to the Government's attention.

Yours sincerely

Simon Birmingham