



Chief Executive Women

Women leaders enabling women leaders

MEDIA RELEASE

30 March 2017

Women leaders call for action to address declining participation in STEM

Women leaders in business and academia have called on industry and the education sector to urgently address declining participation in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects among young people, particularly girls.

The call from women leaders comes in response to new research, supported by Chief Executive Women (CEW) and the Office for Women, that outlines a new vision for STEM education in Australia, based on international best practice.

Minister for Employment and Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash said given that three-quarters of Australia's fastest growing occupations require skills in science, engineering, technology and maths, it was critical that young women are equipped with the skills they require for the future economy.

"Ensuring Australian girls have the skills to enter into STEM industries will deliver significant benefits to the individual, the economy and the country," Minister Cash said.

"This is why the Turnbull Government has championed important initiatives such as the National Innovation and Science Agenda."

The women leaders were part of a panel brought together today by CEW, and the Commonwealth Bank, to discuss the research and its implications.

Panellists included Catherine Livingstone AO, Kathryn Fagg, President of Chief Executive Women, Professor Doreen Thomas, Head of the Department of Engineering at the University of Melbourne, and Vittoria Shortt, Group Executive Group Marketing and Strategy at the Commonwealth Bank.

Catherine Livingstone AO said, "It's one thing to say that we need STEM skills for jobs but actually we need STEM skills to think."

The research recognised much of the good work taking place in Australia but highlighted the need for a more coordinated approach.

“Fragmentation in the STEM ecosystem is extraordinary. Everyone is trying to do the right thing but existing programs would have so much more leverage if they were better coordinated,” said Catherine Livingstone AO.

Kathryn Fagg said, “The jobs of the future will be about innovation, and STEM is a crucial part of that equation.

“As an engineer, I know that girls who do engineering do it because they love problem solving and want to make a difference.”

Professor Doreen Thomas said, “We must do more to encourage students at school to take the advanced subjects. Maths, physics and the other sciences build on each other, layer by layer, and the earlier you lay the foundations the better.”

The research was conducted as part of the Barbara Cail STEM Fellowship by science teacher and STEM advocate Ms Sarah Chapman, and Dr Rebecca Vivian, Research Fellow for the Computer Science Education Research Group at the University of Adelaide.

Belinda Gibson, board member of Chief Executive Women, and leader of the STEM Fellowship initiative at CEW said that as leaders, we must do everything we can to enable all our young people to participate to the fullest in the modern economy.

“For women to be able to fill their fair share of leadership roles in the future, we need to ensure they have both the inspiration and the opportunity to engage with the STEM subjects,” said Ms Gibson.

The Fellows’ report, *Engaging the Future of STEM*, highlighted the importance of adopting a coordinated, national approach to engaging young people in STEM, providing greater support to teachers, working more closely with industry and making sure information is tailored to young people and their families.

The report outlines eight key actions to drive positive change in the Australian national STEM ecosystem.

A copy of the report *Engaging the Future of STEM* can be downloaded at www.cew.org.au

ENDS

For more information, please contact:
Lisa Jervis (Chief Executive Women Ltd)
0491 217 564

Background

Chief Executive Women (CEW) was established in 1985 by eighteen influential Australian women and now represents over 420 Australian women leaders from the corporate, public service, academic and not-for-profit sectors. Through its advocacy, targeted programs and scholarships CEW works to remove the barriers to women's progression and ensure equal opportunity for prosperity.

Barbara Cail AO was the Founding President of CEW in 1985 and has been a constant advocate for women and for STEM participation. Recipients of Barbara Cail STEM Fellowships will be known as 'Barbara Cail Fellows' in her honour.

CEW's partnership with the Office for Women will help to improve equal economic participation and secure opportunities for Australian women.