2 December 2014

The Hon Christopher Pyne MP
Minister for Education
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Re: Review of the Australian Curriculum

The signatories to this letter, the Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA), Australian Industry Group (AiGroup), Australian Computer Society (ACS), Australian Council of Deans of ICT (ACDICT), Australian Council for Computers in Education (ACCE), Australian Mathematics Trust (AMT), Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE), Digital Careers and StartUpAus, welcome the Government’s public support for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects in schools.

The Government’s investment in STEM and Vocational Education and Training in its Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda, coupled with its endorsement of the Chief Scientist’s Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in the National Interest: A Strategic Approach paper released in early October, signals a clear understanding and commitment to deepening Australia’s STEM capability.

With this in mind, we are concerned by the recommendations of the recent Review of the Australian Curriculum, specifically the proposal that a dedicated technology subject only apply from Year 9 of secondary school. This is at odds with the work of the Australian Curriculum and Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) which, in consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including the States and Territories developed a comprehensive Technologies Curriculum comprising two complementary strands, Digital Technologies and Design & Technologies that should be taught from foundation primary levels through to Year 10.

In his recent speech The Importance of Tech Education in Our Schools (24 October 2014), the Minister for Communications Malcolm Turnbull, strongly made the point that in order for Australia to remain competitive we need to equip our students for the jobs of tomorrow and “... move beyond teaching students how to consume technology and instead focus on the creation of technology”. Minister Turnbull provides explicit support for the teaching of ICT and specifically coding and computational thinking from Foundation to Year 10, acknowledging that machine languages and logic are increasingly as important as basic literacy and numeracy. This capability can only be developed with an explicit focus on ICT throughout primary and secondary school levels and appropriate pathways for students to study ICT through to university.

It is our view the Digital Technologies Curriculum developed by ACARA is essential to Australia’s competitiveness in a global world where technical literacy is core to the productivity and innovative capacity of all economies. The fact that Australia is already struggling to keep pace with competitors such as the US, UK and China in the area of STEM and specifically ICT capability (as highlighted in the Chief Scientist’s recent Report), demonstrates the need to be proactive in building these skills sooner rather than later. We are genuinely concerned that delaying the Technologies subject area to secondary school is too late - both in terms of national skill development and the ability to influence the career choices of young people.

We strongly urge that the 12 December 2014 meeting of the Education Council, all Federal and State Education Ministers, reject the recommendation of the Review that Technologies, in particular Digital Technologies, only be introduced from Year 9 of the Curriculum. Consistent with the subject matter expert advice provided to the Review, we recommend retention of Digital
Technologies studies from Foundation through to Year 10. This aligns with the adoption in September 2014 by the United Kingdom of computer coding as a mandatory subject in all primary schools - a decision made in recognition of the vital role ICT skills play in driving the productivity and competitiveness of all modern economies. Undoubtedly other countries will move to adopt similar policies.

We are happy to discuss this issue further and would be pleased to work with Federal and State Governments to ensure the successful implementation and ongoing support of the ACARA proposed Digital Technologies Curriculum.

A copy of this letter will be sent to the Education Ministers of all States and Territories.

Yours sincerely,

Suzanne Campbell
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Information Industry Association
s.campbell@aiia.com.au

cc. The Hon Ian Macfarlane
Minister for Industry
By email: Ian.Macfarlane.MP@aph.gov.au

Innes Willox
CEO, AiGroup

Professor Robin King FTSE
FTSE Chair, Education Forum
Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering

Brenda Aynsley
CEO, Australian Computer Society

Alan Noble
Director, StartupAUS

Ashley Brinson
Executive Director, The Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering

Dr Karsten Schulz
Program Director, Digital Careers National
Mike Clapper, Executive Director
Australian Mathematics Trust

Dr Jason Zagami, President of the Australian Council for Computers in Education

Professor Iwona Miliszewska,
President, Australian Council of Deans of ICT