

TALL POPPY CAMPAIGN

Investing in Australia's Future

- MEDIA RELEASE -

Science for the next generation: Computers that actually understand English and intergalactic studies.

These are some of the topics that three of Australia's most prominent young scientists will be exploring on Thursday when they visit Callaghan College to inspire students about careers in science.

Dr James Curran, Dr Geoff Isbister and Dr Andrew Hopkins research Computational Linguistics, Clinical Toxinology and Astrophysics, respectively. Recently awarded 'Young Tall Poppy Awards' by the Australian Institute of Policy and Science, these young scientists have embarked on an educational program in which they present their research to school students.

Dr Curran is working on developing computer programs that enable us to type a question into a search engine like Google and get an exact answer.

Dr Curran explains: "At the moment when you type a question into a search engine, you will get a list of links that may or may not be what you were looking for. My work is about enabling computers to understand the syntactic or grammatical structures of human languages - not just identify words."

"Although computers influence nearly every aspect of our lives, we are still a long way short of exploiting them fully to access and manipulate information. We need young people with energy and imagination who have grown up through the information revolution to develop technology of the future," says Dr Curran.

Currently University of Sydney Fellow in the School of Information Technologies, Dr Curran's work is also applied to developing more accurate language translation software.

Dr Geoff Isbister conducts Australia-wide research on the effects of venomous snake, spider and jellyfish bites. His research discovered that contrary to popular belief, bites from white tail spiders don't cause necrosis or any other major effects. More recently he has undertaken research into the use of hot water immersion for bluebottle stings and been awarded the Medical Journal of Australia/Wyeth award for the best research article in 2006.

"It is important that young people develop an interest in science because there is an increasing lack of young scientists in a world that is becoming more and more dependent on technology and scientific endeavour," explains Dr Isbister.

Dr Isbister currently holds an NHMRC Clinical Career Development Award and works at the Calvary Mater Hospital in Newcastle and the Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin.

Dr Andrew Hopkins studies the evolution of galaxies including our own Milky Way and others both near and far from us.

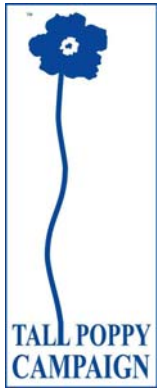
"'What's out there?' is a question everyone has asked at some point in their life and my research aims to contribute a piece of the puzzle in answering that question," says Dr

Founded by the Australian Institute of Policy and Science

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Hopkins, who is an Australian Research Council Queen Elizabeth II Fellow in the School of Physics, at the University of Sydney.

"It's fundamentally interesting in itself to learn about the nature of our Universe. Astronomy is a great way for students to be introduced to science more generally, and the excitement and opportunities it offers," says Dr Hopkins.

The school visits program is part of the Tall Poppy Campaign, a project of the Australian Institute of Policy and Science in partnership with the NSW Department of Education and Training, with sponsorship from the NSW Office for Science & Medical Research, which aims to highlight the work of Australia's best young scientists and to inspire young Australians to see the relevance of science in today's world.

"There is a shortage of young people entering and graduating degrees in the sciences - the excitement and professional and personal rewards of science are often not recognised in our society," says Tall Poppy Campaign Director, Dorothy Davis.

"These school visits target Year 10 and 11 students who are thinking seriously about their tertiary education and career choices," Mrs Davis said.

"These Young Tall Poppy Scientists demonstrate to the next generation that a career in science in Australia can be exciting, rewarding and at the forefront of scientific developments worldwide," Mrs Davis added.

The Young Tall Poppy Scientists will visit Callaghan College, Jesmond Campus (Janet Street, Newcastle) on Thursday 7 June, from 9.30am – 1.00pm.

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