

TALL POPPY CAMPAIGN

Investing in Australia's Future

- MEDIA RELEASE -

All in a day's work: Curing cancer, asthma and developing computers that think for themselves

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

Dr Douglas Aberdeen, Dr Alaina Ammit and Dr Geraldine O'Neill research artificial intelligence, asthma and cancer cell biology, 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 Douglas Aberdeen develops methods to allow computers to 'learn' from experience. Known as Artificial Intelligence, or A.I., his work enables computers to do complex tasks like controlling robots, traffic lights and helicopters. He has worked on 'Hawkeye' systems for cricket and 'Bunyip' the world's cheapest super computer.

"Hearing about cutting edge scientific research from someone who is young and Australian shows young people that this is not the job of someone far away on television, there are real people working on this stuff here in Australia – and its fun!" he added.

Dr Alaina Ammit's research focuses on understanding how lungs get inflamed, at a cellular level, with implications for combatting asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (a group of diseases, including chronic bronchitis and emphysema, in which the airway is constricted).

"In Australia asthma affects 1 in 10 adults and 1 in 4 children. We need to do this basic research before we can develop good drugs with minimal side effects," explains Dr Ammit.

Dr Geraldine O'Neill's research focuses on hard-to-treat cancers. Today there are many success stories in cancer, but unfortunately some cancers remain difficult to treat. Dr O'Neill's research uses cutting edge cell biology to understand why some cancers are difficult to cure.

Dr O'Neill adds, "Future improvements in cancer therapy require the best and brightest young minds working on these basic problems. By visiting Dubbo College we hope to inspire enthusiastic and motivated students to think about medical research as a career".

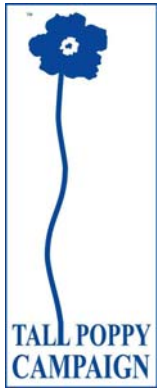
The school visits program is part of the Tall Poppy Campaign, a project of the Australian Institute of Policy and Science in partnership with the NSW Department of Education and Training, with sponsorship from the NSW Office for Science & Medical Research, which aims to highlight the work of Australia's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

Founded by the Australian Institute of Policy and Science

PO Box 145, BALMAIN NSW 2041 Ph: +61 2 9810 5642 Fax: +61 2 9810 2406 email: info@aips.net.au Internet: www.tallpoppies.net.au

The Tall Poppy is a metaphor for excellence and endeavour and symbolises Australia's pride in its outstanding achievers - in all fields.

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“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 Dubbo College (Yarrandale Road, Dubbo) on Thursday afternoon 3 May, from 1.40pm – 3.30pm and Friday morning 4 May, from 9.00am – 10.45am.

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