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# TALL POPPY CAMPAIGN

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*Investing in Australia's Future*

## - MEDIA RELEASE -

### **Top scientists to inspire rising stars in science at high schools in Wingham and Forster-Tuncurry**

**Students at Wingham High School and Great Lakes College will receive a visit from three of Australia's most prominent young scientists – including one former Wingham student – on Tuesday.**

Dr Andrew Hopkins, Dr James Curran and Dr Merridee Wouters, are top researchers in Astrophysics, Computational Linguistics and Structural Bioinformatics, respectively. Recently awarded 'Young Tall Poppy Awards' by the Australian Institute of Policy and Science, they have embarked on an educational program to inspire a future generation of scientists.

Dr Andrew Hopkins, a former student of Wingham High School, 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 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.

Dr Hopkins sponsors the annual 'Andrew Hopkins Excellence in Science Award' for the highest achieving Year 12 student in science at Wingham High School.

"Providing this award is my way of giving back to the school whose teachers inspired me about science and doing something to increase the dwindling number of young Australians going into careers in the sciences," explains Dr Hopkins.

And it appears to have been successful so far: the three students who have won the award since its inception in 2005 have all gone on to study science-based courses at university.

Dr James 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."

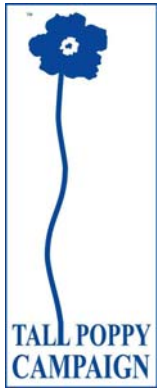
"Although computers influence nearly every aspect of our lives, we are still a long way short of exploiting them fully to access and manipulate information. We need young people with energy and imagination who have grown up through the information revolution to develop technology of the future," says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

**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](mailto:info@aips.net.au) Internet: [www.tallpoppies.net.au](http://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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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 Merridee Wouters researches protein structures to better understand the human body. Dr Wouters uses computational techniques to gather information and establish relationships between genes and diseases. Her work has included the development of an enzyme found in prehistoric mammals to enable scientists to better understand evolutionary changes in genes.

"Doing research is like being paid to do Sudoku every day. It's satisfying working something out and realising that you are the first to understand it," says Dr Wouters.

Dr Wouters is currently a Senior Research Scientist and Group Leader at the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute and Senior Lecturer in the School of Medicine at the University of New South Wales.

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 the 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.

**Locations & Times:**

- Great Lakes College – Tuncurry Senior Campus  
Northern Parkway, Tuncurry,  
Tuesday 14 August,  
9.00am – 11.00am.
- Wingham High School  
9 Rowley St, Wingham,  
Tuesday 14 August,  
1.50pm – 3.00pm.

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