

New program to guide disadvantaged children into higher education: "Compass" program launched by Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard

A new University of Sydney program to encourage children from low socio-economic backgrounds to aspire to higher education from as early as primary school was launched today by Federal Education Minister the Hon. Julia Gillard MP, and University of Sydney Vice-Chancellor Dr Michael Spence.

The "Compass – find your way to higher education" program is funded for three years by \$3.5 million from the federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; \$2 million from the University of Sydney; and \$100,000 from the NSW Department of Education and Training.

It will see the University of Sydney partner with the NSW Department of Education and Training and selected secondary and primary schools in Sydney. Together they will develop and run outreach, mentoring and professional development programs to increase school completion rates, and raise community expectations, student attainment and aspiration.

The program was launched today in the company of 175 primary and high school students, local to the University of Sydney, who took over the University's famous Quadrangle as they experienced activities and projects designed to help them see universities as welcome, stimulating environments.

Activities included a seminar on making the perfect chocolate bar; getting the chance to play dentist and fill a tooth; taking blood pressure and reading sugar levels; identification of animal skulls; testing model paper planes; and putting on a toga to learn about the ancient myths of the Medusa.

Before the launch Compass schools and students participated in various science activities, including Dr Karl's 'Great Moments in Science' talk, Nicholson Museum and Seymour Centre visits.

In launching the program, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Sydney Dr Michael Spence said that Compass will build on the University's strong history of support for low socio-economic status students, including extensive financial, learning and personal support, and a specialised first-year transition program. Dr Spence said it was clear that there are real obstacles for many people to attend university or aspire to higher education, which the University of Sydney was committed to helping

them overcome.

"All the research underlines the fact that at university, students from low SES backgrounds have excellent rates of retention and success," Dr Spence said. "If Australia is to rethink the way we deal with educational disadvantage we should be giving as much attention to the issue of a student's educational potential as we do to their educational attainment. That's why we're working with school students, their teachers and families to show them what is possible." 2 2

Schools that will be participating in the program identified science, mathematics, music and information technology as areas where the University could add value through staff capacity-building programs, and curriculum and student learning support.

The program will target parents as well as students to ensure they know about the role, purpose and accessibility of higher education, including information about financial support, and familiarity with university life.

University of Sydney Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) Derrick Armstrong, who will oversee the Compass program, said the emphasis on mentoring students early, and encouraging them to think about higher education as a real possibility was extremely important.

"There is considerable evidence that aspirations are formed early in life and that family experience of higher education is a key factor in influencing attitudes. This is why Compass will engage with students, and the people who influence them, early in their schooling, with continuing contact throughout their school career," Professor Armstrong said.

The Compass project will focus its attention on years 3 4 & 5 in primary schools and years 8, 9 and 10 in high schools. It will engage more than 1,200 students in the Kogarah and Marrickville regions in 2009 as it interacts with two secondary schools and six feeder primary schools. The program will expand into another eight schools in south-west Sydney in 2010. Specific activities in the program include:

Visits to the University of Sydney by primary school students for cultural and learning activities;

Creation of an online site or blog for primary students, teachers and university academics to share experiences and feedback;

Half-day visits to primary schools by University students and staff to support program and learning activities;

Student experience days at the University for years 9 and 10, including faculty-based activities,

campus tours and a session on 'what university is really like' by current students;

Study groups/mentoring for small groups of year 9 and 10 students, facilitated by university students;

School-based and University-based master classes. School-based classes will allow students in years 8, 9 and 10 to work with University staff and students on a specific subject. University-based classes (for years 9 or 10) will involve two or three days intensive on-campus study;

Science Alliance program, including professional development days for secondary science teachers, and a variety of events for students. These include 'Giant Science' experience days at the University, 'Kickstart Workshops' for Higher School Certificate science students, and 'Science in the City'



workshops of hands-on experiments, lectures and seminars for years 3,4,5 8 9 & 10;

University student ambassadors will visit secondary schools to present at assemblies, daily home-group sessions and participate in video conferences.



AUSTRALASIAN HELLENIC EDUCATIONAL PROGRESSIVE ASSOCIATION
EDUCATION COMMITTEE NSW

are holding a

Children's Festival

on the

Sunday, 14th June 2009

10am – 4pm

at

AHEPA Hall
394 Princes Highway, Rockdale



Jumping Castle,



Karaoke,

Face Painting,

Clown,

Greek Dancing
Sophia Haska Dancers

Poster Competition
Year 3 – 6, Theme is "My Favourite Pet". Size A3. Comp closes 1pm. Sunday, 14th June, 2009.



Raffle to be drawn at 3pm.

Parents while your children are having a great day with so many interesting things to do, you can have a quiet cup of coffee and a snack in the "Kafeneo!"

We look forward to seeing you and your children, grandchildren, godchildren, nieces and nephews.

Entry – Adults \$10 p.h.

Children – FREE

**For all enquiries – Christine Lynch 0410 635 386
Helen Katsaros 0421 339 660**