The NSW Brain Bee Challenge

The University of Western Sydney Schools Engagement Program provides primary and high school students with opportunities to not only improve their academic performance, but also to expand their horizons.

UWS runs and hosts the NSW Brain Bee Challenge. Brain Bee is the only neuroscience competition in Australia. It motivates young people to learn about the brain and aims to inspire them to pursue careers in biomedical research and neuroscience. The competition is open to year 10 students and runs in all Australian states and territories and both islands of New Zealand. The overall Australasian champion has the opportunity to compete in the international competition, which is held in the USA.

Brain Bee is run annually. In 2009 over 1100 NSW students entered the competition, with the first round being run in-school. The final, which begins with a written test, had 128 participants from 34 schools. The highest scorers go on to compete in an oral competition with increasingly difficult questions. There is also a teams’ competition which is often very closely-fought.

The NSW Brain Bee competition is sponsored by Queensland Brain Institute, University of Queensland, UWS, ADInstruments and Brain Sciences UNSW. The support of the sponsors means that the winning students, teams and schools receive some excellent prizes and opportunities, including scholarship offers to UWS for the top three students.

Professor of Integrative Physiology at the UWS School of Medicine, Vaughan Macefield, runs the competition and compères the finals. Professor Macefield said, ‘This is a great way for students to learn more about the brain and test their knowledge in a supportive environment. We hope that some of these students will become Australia’s top neuroscientists of the future, and all of them have the talent and potential to achieve wonderful things in any of the sciences or in health and medicine. We are always impressed by how much the students have studied, and the extent of their knowledge’.
Students, teachers and parents attending the finals also benefit from short presentations on interesting aspects of neuroscience, delivered by UWS academics, as well as talks by UWS Advanced Science students. The year 10 students enjoy computer-based learning sessions in either neurophysiology or neuroanatomy, and medical research laboratory tours.

Entries open in November for the following year and the first round is held in March. The finals are held in July.

For further information about the NSW State Finals of the Australian Brain Bee Challenge contact Professor Vaughan Macefield at the UWS School of Medicine v.macefield@uws.edu.au, or SchoolsEngagement@uws.edu.au

For further information about the national Australian Brain Bee Challenge see http://www.abbc.edu.au/