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News

Chance for 'best, brightest' to teach

MARIA MOSCARITOLO, EDUCATIONNOW EDITOR

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HIGH-ACHIEVING university graduates will be asked to take a two-year career detour - to teach disadvantaged children.

Modelled on similar programs in the UK and the U.S., the **Teach For Australia** program will take graduates from various fields and give them accelerated training to teach in public secondary schools for two years.

They will be mentored by teachers and business leaders during their placement. After that time, they can stay on as qualified teachers or move to a job in the business world with corporate employers who partner in the program.

Businesses including BHP, Boston Consulting Group, Microsoft and law firms Corrs Chambers Westgarth and Freehills have expressed interest in participating.

The program will start in Victorian schools next year with up to 90 graduates, and eventually be rolled out nationally.

Education Minister Julia Gillard said the overseas experience showed the programs "deliver better student outcomes and help raise the status of the profession".

However, it would rely on the "altruism" and curiosity of graduates interested in giving teaching a shot for a couple of years.

"It's going to make a real difference by creating a new way for the best and the brightest to go teaching," she said.

"It's made a huge difference overseas. It can make a huge difference here."

Plans to introduce the program were flagged last year by Ms Gillard.

Graduates can apply up to five years after completing their degree (though the program is not open to those who hold a degree or diploma in education).

About half of the graduates who volunteer for the UK program, Teach First, reportedly stay in teaching and the rest move on to other jobs.

Jim Davies, the head of the South Australian Secondary Principals Association said the program would be a welcome means of getting more science and mathematics expertise into schools.

The Business Council of Australia has given the program its backing.