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Boot camp plan gets teachers trained faster

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STEPHEN FLEGG might be sitting behind a computer screen in a glass tower in Sydney, working for a bank or a stockbroking firm, were it not for a presentation one of his friends attended at Sydney University in April.

Instead, after a six-week "boot camp" at the University of Melbourne, he is preparing to move to Shepparton in Victoria for a two-year adventure as a secondary school teacher.

The group giving that presentation was Teach for Australia, an organisation championed by the federal Education Minister, Julia Gillard. It aims to recruit talented non-teaching graduates to the most challenging classrooms.

The program was a perfect fit for Mr Flegg, 22, who had become interested in teaching but was baulking at spending another year at university to gain a diploma, after completing an undergraduate degree in finance and a masters in economics.

"I'm one of those people who like to get thrown into something to learn, instead of just sitting back at university and learning the theory," he said.

On Wednesday he starts at McGuire College, where he will teach accounting, economics, maths and personal development. He is keen to use his background to give children financial literacy to manage a credit card or mobile phone bill.

Alyce Cleary, 22, a law and international relations graduate from Banora Point on the Tweed coast, will work at the same school. She hopes to help her students find their passions.

"It's really about raising their expectations of themselves, and to try to get them to work towards something bigger," she said.

Mr Flegg and Ms Cleary are trailblazers, members of the first 45 "associates", as they are called, to be placed in Australian schools. Each has made a two-year commitment. In their school holidays, they will continue studying towards a graduate diploma of education.

This first group will be placed in Victorian schools but it is hoped the program will be expanded nationally.

The program is modelled on similar ones in the US and Britain. Teacher unions say the accelerated preparation demeans the profession.