“I learnt more in a week here than in a term at school!” said top high school science student Lyn-Lee Teh.

Lyn-Lee, from St Mary’s and fellow Year 12 student Aditya Chopra from Rossmoyne Senior High School spent a week in Plant Biology with lecturer Dr Patrick Finnegan, as part of the CSIRO Student Research Scheme.

The Australia-wide scheme encourages scientists in universities and other research institutions to take on a small group of students for a week and engage them in a specific project, to give them hands-on experience in science. Only the top students from chemistry and physics are chosen to take part.

Dr Finnegan set the students a project to confirm the identity of a biological sample.

“We get DNA samples from overseas and we have to confirm what they are before we can start working on them,” Dr Finnegan said. “So I got Lyn-Lee and Aditya to do that work.

“They are both exceptionally bright students and they were a joy to work with. They picked up the thread of the project very quickly and did a great job.”

Dr Finnegan had been involved with the Student Research Scheme at the Australian National University and the University of Western Sydney. He sees it as a valuable way of encouraging students to study science. With only bright and enthusiastic students involved, it is usually a bonus for the scientist, rather than a difficult task.

In just 20 hours of laboratory time, the students get their first real idea of what it means to work in a scientific field. After their laboratory work, they went away and wrote up a report on their project and created a poster for presentation to other students in the scheme, at Scitech.

Aditya, who plans to study biomedical science and engineering next year, said he hadn’t done anything like this laboratory work at school. He and Lyn-Lee, who hopes to study medicine, were most appreciative of Dr Finnegan’s involvement.

Four other UWA scientists participated in the project: Associate Professor James Trevelyan (engineering); Dr Irek Malecki (animal biology); Dr Shane Maloney (physiology); and Dr Christine Davies (CLIMA).

The priority areas include:

• Students from low socio-economic backgrounds
• Students from rural or remote backgrounds
• Staff and students from culturally diverse backgrounds
• Indigenous staff and students
• Female students at both under and post-graduate levels in areas where they are under-represented
• Staff and students with a disability
• Staff and Students who identify as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgendered or intersex
• Enhancing flexible work practices and work/family/life balance for staff and students
• Initiatives promoting a greater awareness of diversity issues.

The next generation of scientists...

... here’s some we prepared earlier

Aditya Chopra and Lyn-Lee Teh get hands-on scientific experience with Dr Patrick Finnegan

Last year, $15,000 was shared between the Link Week project; a program aimed at encouraging girls to study physics; exam preparation assistance for students with mental health problems; improving access for staff and students with colour deficient vision; wayfinding and directional signage for people with disabilities and other campus users; evaluation of the recruitment and retention of Indigenous students; and the publication of Stories of Success: Ten years of Leadership Development for Women participants.

Information about the funding and an application form are at www.equity.uwa.edu.au (go to Diversity Initiatives Fund). Applications close on Friday October 1. They can be sent electronically or as hard copy to the Equity and Diversity Office, MBPD 350.