

## YL:FEATURE

# SPISE 2015 fostering Erica Virgo's love of science

ERICA VIRGO hails from a small community in Mandeville, Manchester, but this young lady has big dreams. The 17-year-old deCarteret College sixth-form student wants to be a computer programmer, but her love of all things science may open a world of career possibilities for her. In the weeks to come, Erica will get a chance to indulge her passion for science as one of 18 participants in the Student Programme for Innovation in Science and Engineering (SPISE), put on by the Caribbean Science Foundation.

The SPISE programme sees students from across the Caribbean being immersed in an intensive four-week programme during which they will be exposed to university-level courses in calculus, physics, biochemistry and entrepreneurship, taught by eminent academic and industry scientists and engineers from the Caribbean and the United States. The aim is to stimulate an interest in science and engineering and to groom the next generation of science, engineering, business and technology leaders in the region. The participating students are from 10 countries – Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana,



From left: Senator Dr The Hon Esther Byer Suckoo, minister of labour and social security, Barbados, poses with SPISE students Erica Virgo and Terrickia Benjamin. Sharing in the moment are Klao Bell Lewis, head of corporate communications at the Caribbean Development Bank, and Professor Cardinal Wade, interim executive director of the Caribbean Science Foundation. The occasion was the launch of the SPISE programme on Sunday, July 19.

Jamaica, Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and Trinidad – and they are being hosted at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill campus in Barbados.

The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) has once again thrown its support behind the effort to groom the region's next generation of science and technology leaders and has sponsored two students this year: Erica Virgo and Terrickia Benjamin from Antigua. At the launch of the programme on Sunday, July 19, Virgo spoke of her future ambitions. "I have always had a passion for the sciences ... and now my career goal is to become a computer programmer. My dream is to travel the world and see all the different sights and interact with the cultures."

All SPISE students attend the programme free of charge, with sponsorships covering the costs of round-trip airfare from their home countries to Barbados, as well as living expenses for the four weeks. Students will also participate in hands-on projects to design, build and test systems in the areas of underwater robotics and electronics.

"We believe that developing an interest in science and technology among our young people is crucial for the future development of our region. Our goal, through sponsoring students to participate in SPISE, is to stimulate science and technology entrepreneurship among our youth," said Klao Bell-Lewis, head of corporate communications, CDB.



Dr Dinah Sah (centre), senior vice-president of neuroscience at Voyager Therapeutics and a director of the Student Program for Innovation in Science and Engineering (SPISE), with students from Jamaica (from left) Fitzroy Wickham, Erica Virgo, Brandon Chin-Loy and Melissa Douglas, at the launch of the SPISE programme on Sunday, July 19, at the University of the West Indies. SPISE is an intensive four-week residential programme for Caribbean high-school students, focusing on science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The students, along with 14 others from across the region, will spend the next four weeks doing university-level courses in calculus, physics, biochemistry and entrepreneurship, with the aim being to stimulate an interest in science and engineering. Students will also participate in hands-on projects to design, build and test systems in the areas of underwater robotics and electronics. The Caribbean Development Bank is a sponsor of the programme.