Leading universities into the future . . .

When the time comes for a changing of the guard at the University of Wollongong, the next generation of academics must have the leadership skills to carry UOW forward and continue to build on its position as one of the most successful universities in Australia.

A team of senior researchers at UOW is making sure they will be ready. Supported by an Australian Learning and Teaching Council grant, the team is developing PROPEL – A Program for Preparing Early Leaders. Early-career academics will complete an intensive 12-month program to develop their leadership abilities.

“Australia needs a new generation of effective and capable leaders to ensure a prosperous future for its higher education sector,” joint-project leader Associate Professor Wilma Vialle said. “It is no longer good enough to wait for new leaders to surface. They must be nurtured and developed if universities are to avoid facing a leadership succession crisis.”

The PROPEL project has the backing of university and industry leaders from around Australia, including UOW’s former Vice-Chancellor Emeritus Professor Ken McKinnon who will advise the project team based on his extensive leadership experience.

In the Bradley Review of Australia’s higher education system Professor Denise Bradley said that the country must “create an outstanding, internationally competitive tertiary education system to meet Australia’s future needs”. Joint-project leader Professor Sara Dolnicar believes UOW’s ability to excel in this new system will be determined by the quality of its leaders, not just at the top but at all levels of the institution. Professor Bradley has expressed a strong interest in the PROPEL project and will be invited to contribute to its development.

“PROPEL is not just about training academics for a particular leadership role. It is about laying the foundations for their entire leadership career,” Professor Dolnicar said. “Someone who is a skilful leader will inspire people around them and take the University forward, even before they reach a formal leadership position.”

PROPEL is in the development stages with the first participants starting in September. The program will be based on existing research into academic leadership, as well as original research conducted by the project team. One of the main features of PROPEL will be its ‘big picture’ component, which will allow participants a behind-the-scenes look at the high-level decision making processes at the University. Each participant will have a leadership mentor who will guide their development throughout the program.

The first PROPEL program to run at UOW will include a number of participants from other Australian universities. Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and joint-project leader, Professor Rob Castle, said these external participants will become ambassadors for PROPEL helping to promote the program across the Australian university sector.

Media please note

For more information contact Professor Sara Dolnicar on 0405 759 031 or sarad@uow.edu.au or Associate Professor Wilma Vialle on 4221 4434 or wvialle@uow.edu.au