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MEDIA RELEASE

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Notre Dame academics lead $150,000 education project

Three senior School of Education academics at The University of Notre Dame Australia’s Fremantle Campus will facilitate a $150,000 project to assist selected teachers to become mentors in an effort to address longevity in the teaching profession and improve teaching quality in Western Australia.

The project is being funded by the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia which is upskilling teachers who have been identified as potential professional mentors.

The Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality, a $550 million Federal Government program over five years, aims to implement a range of nationally sustainable reforms to attract, train, place, develop and retain quality teachers and leaders at schools and in classrooms.

School of Education Dean, Professor Michael O’Neill; Associate Dean (Teaching), Professor Richard Berlach and Associate Dean (Religious Education), Associate Professor Maureen Mears, will be conducting independent projects involving teachers at metropolitan and regional schools in WA under the Mentor Teacher Program branch of the National Partnership.

The projects will see selected teachers, who have exhibited ‘mentor-like’ qualities at their respective schools, develop these skills and offer support to new graduates and second, third and fourth year Notre Dame Education students.

Professor O’Neill and Associate Professor Mears will work with teachers at St Jerome’s Primary School in Munster and Corpus Christi College in Bateman to examine the progress of practicum students in meeting the new national teaching graduate standards developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.
As well as working with these two schools, Professor Berlach will concentrate on training teachers in the Geraldton and Kalgoorlie districts to become mentors for fellow staff and practicum students.

With statistics showing that some 40 per cent of teachers leave the profession within the first five years after graduating, Professor Berlach hopes that mentor training will curb the attrition by encouraging teachers to stay in the profession longer.

Professor O’Neill believes projects similar to the Mentor Teacher Program can increase the capacity for all teachers to become mentors.

“Research tells us that more time pre-service teachers have in the classroom under quality mentoring and supervision, the more their capacity is built and the better chances they have of staying in the profession longer,” Professor O’Neill said.

“Our current program, which provides students with 32 weeks of classroom experience over their degree, ensures students get an authentic immersion in the classroom and these mentoring programs will only enhance those experiences further.

“I think it’s incredibly important that academics in our positions are actively engaged in the classroom to observe how students develop in their maturation and learning capacity to apply their theory in practice.”

Professor O’Neill, Professor Berlach and Associate Professor Mears will complete a research paper based on the experience of the mentors after the project concludes in November 2011.

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CAPTION: Professor Richard Berlach, Associate Professor Maureen Mears and Professor Michael O’Neill will facilitate a $150,000 program to assist selected teachers to become mentors in metropolitan and regional Western Australia.