Message from the Dean
This Educator highlights some of our achievements in 2014. In Research, our participation in the inaugural UWA Research Week and staff members’ success in winning large grants highlights the high calibre and social relevance of our research projects. Some of our doctoral students are doing extraordinarily important work researching leadership in post-conflict societies, and the Faculty continues to provide a national service by analysing the Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 NAPLAN data.

In Teaching our staff continue to excel, win university-wide recognition and provide high quality supervision for our Master’s and Doctoral students. This year sees the completion of the first students of the new Master of School Leadership degree, funded by the Department of Education. We are also delighted that UWA’s Early Learning Centre was this year given an excellent rating by the regulating authority: our pre-service teachers have the best possible learning environment as they develop into leaders in Early Childhood Care and Education.

I thank our staff and students for their stellar achievements in 2014 and wish all a safe and joyful festive season.

Winthrop Professor Helen Wildy

Faculty excels in research funding

Researchers at the UWA Faculty of Education lead a number of large research projects, including two initiatives granted extremely competitive federal funding this year.

Professor Vaille Dawson and a team from Curtin University are part of a national consortium led by University of Sydney that has been awarded $1.9 million by the Federal Government through the Australian Science and Maths Partnership Program. The “Advancing Science and Engineering through Laboratory Learning (ASELL) for Schools”-project will enable science and engineering academics to work in collaboration with science teachers to develop science inquiry activities for students in Years 7-10. “The three-year project will be conducted in schools in Western Australia and the Northern Territory,” said Vaille. “It presents a unique opportunity for collaboration between researchers and practitioners to improve student learning and interest in science and engineering.”

Another research project seeks to improve the Writing performance assessment component of the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). “Because there are rarely straightforward correct or incorrect answers in areas such as English and The Arts, a key challenge is to develop a systematic assessment approach that is as accurate and reliable as possible, without compromising on the validity of the tasks the students engage with,” said Associate Professor Stephen Humphry, who leads the project with Professor David Andrich. “Our research will make these assessments not only valid and reliable, but also efficient,” he added.

The NAPLAN project is one of only eight Education research projects Australia-wide funded in this year’s ARC Linkage grants.

2015 Courses
Applications are still open for the Faculty’s 2015 courses, including initial teacher education degrees and a great range of courses designed for practising education professionals, such as the Master of Curriculum Studies and Master of Educational Leadership. Visit education.uwa.edu.au for more.
First harvest in School Leadership

UWA has run the Master of School Leadership program for teachers in Western Australian public schools since 2012, with 40 to 50 teachers enrolling in the flexible part-time course each year. Janette Gee is the program’s first graduate.

The Principal of Yule Brook College, Janette is currently seconded full time as the President of the Western Australian Secondary School Executives’ Association (WASSEA). Janette was first driven to do the course out of a desire to lead by example: “I did not feel I could encourage emerging leaders in my school to pursue quality professional learning if I had not enrolled myself,” she said. “The course itself appealed because the content was relevant and the structure looked manageable - the condensed delivery mode was a particularly strong point.”

“The definite highlight for me was the joining like-minded people in a common goal. Working along enthusiastic, intelligent and committed individuals is both refreshing and invigorating. I have made many friends and professional contacts in the cohort I started with and this has been a valuable support both at uni and in our professional lives,” said Janette.

For those who are considering enrolling, Janette recommends first talking to others in the program to get a sense of the time commitment involved, to apply for a scholarship through the Institute of Professional Learning, and, finally, “Give it a go! I have found the course to be thought-provoking, interesting and relevant.”

Award for a world-class thesis

Dr Mark Fielding, who won the Faculty’s ‘Fogarty Foundation Success Through Educational Excellence Prize for the Best Piece of Research in the Doctor of Education’ this year, has won a further award for his thesis. Mark’s thesis about international education in Australia was rated highest by the International Educational Association of Australia (IEAA).

In his thesis Mark analysed the perspectives of Australian independent secondary school leaders, teachers and students on their school’s engagement with the internationalisation of education. “Secondary schools are engaging with the processes of internationalisation in different ways depending on a number of significant factors such as how participants conceptualised the internationalisation of education, the goals and strategic plans of the school, the nature of student demographics, family expectations and school resources,” said Mark.

“The research shows that schools need to take a more critically active role in engaging with internationalisation in order to shape it beyond its current predominantly neoliberal manifestation, so that the outcomes of education are better suited to the aspirations of the societies they serve.”

Mark will present on his research at the IEAA symposium in Melbourne next year.
Early learning excellence

The University of Western Australia’s Early Learning Centre has achieved a first for WA by being awarded an Excellent rating by the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). The Excellent rating is the highest rating an education and care service can achieve under the National Quality Framework (NQF) for Early Childhood Education and Care.

The rating process is designed to ensure that services engage and involve families and the community in the profession’s discussion about quality and what is important in education and care.

In a joint project with the Schools of Music from UWA and the University of Melbourne, the Centre has investigated the effects of sharing musical experiences between home and service environments on children’s learning. The Centre had also established partnerships with several research organisations. One project involves a partnership involves project with Child Australia, which enables educators to explore new ways to document and assess children’s learning. The Centre has also worked in partnership with Signing Hands and trialled a new Sign Language for Babies program.

ACECQA Board Member for Western Australia, Mark Brown, said “It’s very exciting to award the first Excellent rating to a service in Western Australia and to publicly recognise UWA Early Learning Centre’s outstanding commitment to improving quality outcomes for children in Australia.”

“Services awarded the Excellent rating must demonstrate exceptional education and care, leadership, a commitment to continuous improvement and forward planning, and a willingness to share their knowledge with other parts of the sector,” said Mark, and continued “this is a great outcome for children attending UWA Early Learning Centre.”

University Teaching Award for Christine Howitt

The Faculty is thrilled that Associate Professor Christine Howitt has won a university-wide Excellence in Teaching award.

“I am always looking for new ways of presenting knowledge and ideas,” said Christine. “This includes developing learning experiences that relate to popular culture, such as the classic movie Shrek or the more recent success Gravity; using puppets to encourage communication - as young children will speak more openly to a puppet than a teacher; encouraging the use of outdoor classrooms where students use natural resources to develop mathematical and scientific concepts; and embracing a flipped classroom approach to teaching and learning where the majority of lessons are conducted off campus,” she said. “Teaching is a very dynamic process that encourages creativity. This is why I love my job so much!”

Bill Ellis, a second year Master of Teaching student, says that Christine’s passion for teaching is exceptionally inspirational: “She is a superb teacher because she delivers her classes in the manner that she promotes to us. She truly ‘lives’ the lessons, and leads us by example, modelling the way that she hopes we will teach the children in our classes.” For one memorable science lesson Christine even dyed her hair to match the topic!

Christine was also nominated by UWA for the national Office of Learning and Teaching awards.
Inaugural UWA Research Week

In November UWA hosted its first Research Week, an event designed to showcase the range of innovative research undertaken across the university community.

The Faculty of Education hosted a presentation by Professor Donna Cross of the Telethon Kids’ Institute on teacher stress and its impact on the student learning experience. Donna emphasised the importance of supporting educators to manage their mental health: “Teachers cannot support students unless they are themselves supported,” she said. “Early career teachers, and specifically those with three to five years’ experience in the classroom, are most likely to consider leaving the profession, so there needs to be targeted support available to teachers in that stage of their careers,” she added.

Among the key sources of stress identified, alongside challenges brought by issues such as assessment targets, curriculum review and lack of management support, was workplace bullying. Donna noted that given the broad range of communication technologies available people were more accessible than ever, and educators had to be highly aware of their digital reputations. “Search yourself,” she advised, “and not just on Google. See what information comes up on you on different search engines.”


Post-conflict research group thrives

The Faculty’s post-conflict research group has grown this year to a vibrant research community of five doctoral scholars, each with their own area of speciality.

Gilbert Karareba, Thida Kheang, Shayla Ribeiro, Dwi Esti Andriani and Jelena Rakovic specialise in researching school leadership in Rwanda, Cambodia, Timor L’este, rural Java and Serbia respectively. The group’s research emphasises the importance of context in the research and practice of school leadership. Gilbert, who recently presented his research at the Tropical Research Network Conference in Cairns, drew an example from his own fieldwork in Rwanda: “Although the civil war and genocide ended twenty years ago, there are school leadership challenges that can be attributed specifically to the legacies of the conflict,” he said.

Under the guidance of their supervisors, Professors Simon Clarke and Tom O’Donoghue, the post-conflict research groups seeks to develop theoretical models for informing ‘best practice’ in the field, and they have formed a supportive research environment in the process.

Esti, a lecturer at Yogyakarta University, said she was very grateful for the camaraderie of the research group, and having Simon and Tom as her supervisors: “Even though they have very high expectation of their students, their working style is quite flexible and informal, which helps develop good communication.” Jelena – who before coming to Perth had also received scholarships to study in the UK, Denmark, and Spain – also noted the research group has more in common than just their research interests: “We also enjoy international dinners, weekend outings and sports activities together!”