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New research project to provide STEM resources for school principals

Resources specifically designed to better support principals in leading STEM initiatives in Australian schools will be developed as part of a \$2.6 million research project.

The University of Tasmania will co-lead the three-year study which will involve around 200 primary and secondary schools, in remote, rural and metropolitan areas across the country.

Professor Kim Beswick and Associate Professor Sharon Fraser from the University's Faculty of Education, and Professor Vince Geiger from the Australian Catholic University, will lead the study.

They will be joined by representatives of the two national principals' associations (primary and secondary) and colleagues from the University of Queensland, University of Sydney, Flinders University, Macquarie University and the University of Notre Dame Australia.

"There is an increasing need for people to understand science in general and how it can impact on their day-to-day lives – both now and into the future," Professor Beswick said.

"STEM education – encompassing science, technology, engineering and maths – is identified as crucial to the country's future prosperity, especially in relation to job opportunities.

"Principals play a key role in setting the tone and culture of their school environment.

"They also have an intimate knowledge of their local STEM-based industries, where potential exists for further practical opportunities in teaching practices.

"This project is aiming to develop and pilot new approaches to support principals in providing high-quality STEM leadership in schools."

Researchers will undertake an audit of initiatives already underway across schools nationally, identifying best-practise case studies.

A suite of high-quality professional learning resources will be developed and trialled in conjunction with appropriate mentoring approaches.

“To help further support principals, we are also looking to develop mentoring opportunities, which provide an invaluable opportunity to share insights, ideas and guidance,” Professor Beswick said.

Professor Geiger, from ACU’s Learning Sciences Institute of Australia, said STEM literacy was integral to an individual’s social well-being and prosperity of a nation.

“Trends in international assessments of mathematics and science make it clear Australia needs to strengthen its approach to STEM education leadership,” he said.

“Our project’s central aim is to support leadership efforts in STEM education through the development, with principals, of much-needed resources.

“The resources developed through our project will act as a focus for professional learning communities which support, promote and empower leaders of STEM education.

“The professional learning communities of STEM leaders will also provide a source of mentoring opportunities for those aspiring to lead STEM education beyond those directly involved.”

The project, Principals as STEM Leaders – Building the Evidence Base for Improved STEM Learning – is funded by the Australian Government’s Department of Education and Training.

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