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PRESS RELEASE

FNU committed to Fiji's future growth

Suva, Fiji Islands. As Fiji's future lies in its ability to embrace opportunities created by rapid scientific and technological advances, Fiji National University (FNU) reaffirmed its dedication towards ensuring learning and teaching facilities it provides assists in the realisation of this significant goal.

Speaking at the recent National Science and Technology Competition 2017, the FNU Vice Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey said the university takes its duty to the nation seriously.

"As Fiji's national university, we know that it is critically important to provide a comprehensive range of tertiary courses in science and technology, so that we cater for those who want to become technicians and mechanics through to those who aspire to be research scientists," said Professor Healey.

Professor Healey said scientific and technological advances were transforming the daily lives of mankind.

The FNU VC highlighted the following examples:

- Gamification and virtual reality will reshape not only the way we play, but the increasingly the way we learn in the future. Imagine learning how to manage a busy restaurant by entering a virtual reality game where your teachers can test you with a range of simulated scenarios, from an angry guest to a power outage.
- Our global connectivity means that we can already connect with, and work on a range of challenges, with people from around the world. The human genome, for example, was sequenced by interconnected research teams in twenty universities and research centres in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, France, Germany, Canada, and China.
- Robotics will continue to replace humans, but in increasingly sophisticated tasks. Robots took over assembly lines in the 1980s and already we have pilotless drone aircraft and driverless taxis. Robotics and artificial intelligence will change the way we use human labour in the years ahead.
- Biotechnology is allowing us to reshape nature, to eliminate plant disease and increase productivity. Coupled with nanotechnology, which allows us to design molecules, we can cure cancer, eliminate Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. With stem cells, we can restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf.
- Advances in electricity generation, for example through the low-energy splitting of water molecules to create hydrogen gas and the 3D printing of tiny silicone batteries, could transform the way we produce and consume energy.

Professor Healey said if someone has doubts regarding the pace of scientific advancement, one would just have to think back a few generations. Personal computers and cell phones were items that were really costly and the internet still had to be invented.

“Science and technology is happening all around us and, as the leaders of tomorrow, you need to embrace and harness it for the benefit of society and for those who master these disciplines, the world is at your feet,” said Professor Healey.

FNU’s College of Engineering, Science & Technology offers a wide range of programmes in the following areas:

- Bachelors in Engineering: mechanical, civil and electrical (where electrical includes computing, electronics and telecommunications);
- BSc: mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology (remember the old science adage: biology is just chemistry, chemistry is just physics, physics is just math), environmental science, computing and food technology; and
- Certificates and diplomas: agricultural engineering, aircraft maintenance, automotive, broadcast engineering, plumbing, refrigeration, renewable energy etc.

Recently FNU worked with a major New Zealand company, Douglas Pharmaceuticals, which has had a Research and Development (R&D) facility in Nadi to co-design the Certificate IV in Manufacturing Engineering.

The nature of the R&D is that new pharmaceuticals are protected from competition by patents that prevent other companies selling the same drug. As the patents come towards the end of their lives, smaller drug companies like Douglas Pharmaceuticals reverse-engineer the patented drugs, find out how to manufacture generic versions and get their versions approved for sale once the patent finishes.

“Douglas Pharmaceuticals has realised, however, that there is an even bigger market beyond producing generic pharmaceuticals, which is producing nutraceuticals – dietary supplements. Almost all the ingredients for this vast global market are available here in Fiji. But the most lucrative nutraceuticals market is the United States and to sell in that market requires the highest production standards to meet FDA rules, which need highly trained technicians. This is where the new programme comes in and it’s a great example of the way we work with industry to harness the opportunities in science and technology.”

For further information, please contact the Communications Office on 3394 000 ext. 2890.

About the Fiji National University: The Fiji National University (FNU) was established through the merger of 7 government-owned tertiary institutions in Fiji, and commenced operations from 1 January 2010. The constituent institutions are found at over 40 different locations across Fiji, and collectively offer Certificates, Diplomas, Advanced Diplomas, Degrees, Postgraduate qualifications and Skills Upgrading for those who are already in employment. Approximately 30,000 students pass through the University each year. Over the last six years of its operations, the University has registered major achievements with regard to new programme delivery, quality improvements and contribution to research and publications via its 5 Colleges: The College of Humanities & Education (CHE), the College of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences (CMNHS), the College of Engineering, Science & Technology (CEST), the College of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry (CAFF), the College of Business, Hospitality & Tourism Studies (CBHTS) and the National Training & Productivity Centre (NTPC).