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Press Release

Fiji National University holds *Talanoa* session with key stakeholders

Suva, Fiji Islands. There is a greater need for collaboration between government agencies and academic institutions as a major step towards a better understanding of the demand for skilled labour in Fiji and how this can be addressed.

This is one of the key outcomes of the *Talanoa* session hosted by the Fiji National University (FNU) at its Nasese Campus.

The three-hour informal session was attended by senior management from FNU and key stakeholder partners from Government Ministries, Reserve Bank of Fiji, Tertiary Scholarship and Loans Board (TSLB) as well as representatives from the private sector.

The key topics for discussion were:

- 1). What programmes should FNU be offering to support the nation's economic development today?
- 2). What programmes should FNU be offering to support the nation's economic development over the next 5-10 years?

The two questions lead to two related research questions:

- a) What are the graduate outcomes from our current programmes in terms of graduate employment rates and graduate salaries?
- b) What knowledge, skills and competencies will employers need from graduates in 5-10 years?

FNU Vice Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey during his presentation said it was important for key partners to work in harmony in order to address the gaps.

"The first research question can be answered empirically by studying the data. Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) and Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) both hold data on the employment status and earnings of all Fiji residents, which are cross-referenced to an individual's Tax Identification Number (TIN). In the case of graduates who have been in receipt of tuition fee loans, FRCS collects loan repayments through the tax system and remits them to the Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Board (TSLB), so TSLB also holds data on graduate outcomes for the majority of Fijian graduates," said VC Healey.

"The second research question cannot be answered empirically. No concrete data exists for the future demand for skilled labour. But in Fiji, there are government agencies like the Fiji Reserve Bank, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and the Ministry of Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands & Mineral Resources which all aim to predict labour market trends. Investment Fiji and the Fiji Development Bank are both engaged in shaping the future labour market, by targeting emerging sector for inward investment. The various employers' organisation like the Fiji Commerce and Employers are actively planning the future labour market," added Professor Healey.

The workshop heard that Fiji has a young population (the median age is 27 years) and the economy is developing rapidly.

Educating the nation's population is the key to Fiji's continued economic success.

VC Healey said it is critical that FNU invests its resources in university programmes which meet the needs of employers today and in the future.

The *Talanoa* was a major step towards a better understanding of the demand for skilled labour in Fiji.

"The labour market in Fiji is changing rapidly and new industries and sectors are emerging. To help us develop programmes to meet the future needs of employers, we needed to hear from our partners and business leaders. This *Talanoa* meeting of our stakeholders is intended to be an ongoing conversation about the changing demand for highly skilled labour in Fiji," commented Professor Healey.

VC Healey said FNU is proud to be a vocational university and it prepared graduates for real jobs.

"All our programmes are co-designed with employers to equip students to be 'day one work-ready' and all our programmes require students to undertake workplace attachments to prepare them to join the labour force. We judge our performance as a university by the percentage of our graduates getting a job after completing their diplomas and degrees," said VC Healey.

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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 eight 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).