

Call for more students to join National Apprenticeship Scheme



National Apprenticeship Week launch at FNU this morning. Pictured- FNU VC Prof Nigel Healey with Guests and Apprentices.

The Fiji National University (FNU) has launched the National Apprenticeship Week to celebrate and raise public awareness on the impact of apprenticeships on individuals, employers and the economy.

Speaking at the launch at Nasinu Campus, Vice Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey encouraged students to consider joining the National Training and Productivity Centre's (NTPC) National Apprenticeship Scheme to receive hands-on training and skills developments in their respective trade field.

Professor Healey said the apprenticeship scheme has evolved over the years to include formal education combined with employment and on-the-job training.

"Typically, the apprentices are employed by an organisation at a rate which reflects the fact that they require training, and they get this on-the-job training from their employer while they are working," said VC Healey.

"The employers then release the apprentices to study for a trade qualification at a local college or university. The apprenticeship is completed when they have finished both the requisite amount of on-the-job training and the trade qualification, after which they normally remain with their employer at a higher salary."

"Here in Fiji, there is a national apprenticeship scheme which follows these international norms. Our National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC) is at the heart of the system, promoting the scheme, matching organisations and potential apprentices, arranging the academic study – often undertaken on one of FNU's colleges – and overseeing the quality of the on-the-job training. The Government supports the scheme, by giving employers tax breaks on the wages paid to apprentices and supporting the costs of tools and travel to study for apprentices."

Professor Healey said the National Apprenticeship Week would also highlight the value of apprenticeship.

"We all need to work hard to raise awareness of the benefits of apprentices to both young people and employers. This is a national challenge. Fiji needs a skilled labor force to support the nation's economic development. It needs trained plumbers, electricians, carpenters, aircraft mechanics, automotive engineers."

"For apprentices, they can start working at the age of 18, despite having no skills or qualifications and are supported by their employer to learn a trade which will set up for a successful career," he said.

"The advantages for the employers are that they are developing the next generation of tradespeople by training them on-the-job to use the particular machines and instruments needed for their own business. Not only does the system produce qualified, experienced tradespeople, but they have been trained to fit into the employers' organization," said the FNU Vice Chancellor.

Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) which recently recruited 34 apprentices from the Trade Electrical field, hopes to increase the number to 239 by May this year.

General Manager Human Resources Naveen Lakshmaiya said EFL has a lot of focus towards a young team.

"For us as an employer, recruiting apprentices is not a cost, it's an investment that we look into and we will continue to recruit more apprentices in years to come," said Lakshmaiya.

Asco Motors National Fixed Operations Manager Sanjeet Kumar who started his career as an apprentice two decades ago, said a focused apprentice could easily succeed at their workplace.

"Through such schemes employers are able to carry out succession planning to meet their workforce needs. In return this also increases employee retention, increases productivity and promotes development of their own staff," he said.