

CEST moving in the right direction to meet employment demands - Professor Sharma AM, assures stakeholders

The Fiji National University (FNU) is committed to producing specialist and innovative graduates with a passion towards contributing to the nation's economic development.

This was reaffirmed by FNU Council member, Professor Dharmendra Sharma AM, during a recent school, industry and stakeholders meeting organised by the College of Engineering, Science and Technology (CEST) on 18 July.

The multi-stakeholder meeting is an on-going initiative that aims to strengthen collaboration, encourage industry input, provide students with greater exposure to meet industry leaders and discuss their projects and career prospects.

Speaking to those present, Professor Sharma said FNU had made significant progress in the past nine years and would continuously upgrade its delivery of quality learning, teaching and research capabilities to industry standards.

"It is very humbling being here and seeing the support and turnout of the staff and students of the College as well as The University of the South Pacific (USP) and industry representatives," Professor Sharma said.

"This shows commitment to the common cause we share, which is education and our commitment to shaping our futures through education, research and impact."

"Striving for high quality and relevance challenges the higher education sector. We need to establish a foundation for creative and innovative leaps for the future. FNU has all the makings of being a great university, drawing from its rich DNA on providing cutting edge, job-ready education for the professions, one that will take Fiji forward in distinctive ways," he added.

Representatives from USP, Energy Fiji Limited (EFL), Flour Mills of Fiji (FMF) Foods Limited, Poly Products, Vinod Patel Fiji Ltd, Walesi, Ministry of Education, FINTEL, and the Construction Industry Council (CIC) were present at the talanoa session at Derrick Campus.



From left Acting Dean CEST, Salabogi Mavoa, CIC chief executive officer Vijay Naidu, Professor Dharmendra Sharma and CEST Head of Department Electrical & Electronics Engineering Samuela Rokocakau



FNU Council member Professor Dharmendra Sharma.

Professor Sharma, who is currently the Chair of the University Academic Board and Professor of Computer Science at the University of Canberra (UC), said being appointed an FNU Council member provided him with the opportunity to collaborate with the College in his areas of expertise.

"With the background I have and the skills and experience I possess, I felt that I had the opportunity to give back to the country and shape the future of FNU and define it as a university that contributes towards development," said the Australia-based academic.

"I have a particular interest in contributing to shaping our graduates to be trained in the areas of expertise, to be innovative and develop leadership skills and be able to create jobs rather than just seeking jobs. They would add wisdom to the knowledge base and the passion that we already collectively have in Fiji."

The senior academic added that FNU prided itself on the strong working partnership it had with industries in Fiji, saying this was important because "universities that connect with the industries are much more effective and more functional and productive".

CEST Acting Dean, Mr Salabogi Mavoa said the College was also privileged to have hosted an experienced academic such as Professor Sharma who had an excellent understanding about the tertiary education in Fiji, the nation's needs and how these can be formulated to ensure success for both FNU and Fiji.

"We are grateful Professor Sharma had expressed his interest in meeting us, and we talked about how he could support the College in matters such as our pursuit of programmes accreditation," Mavoa said.

"All the CEST Heads of School and Associate Deans were part of the meeting, as well as Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, Professor James Pounder and we are pleased with the outcomes of our talks in the future direction of CEST."

"We have also received positive feedback from our first-ever school, industry and stakeholders event which was hosted by the School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering and we are excited for the next, which is scheduled for this Thursday by the School of Mechanical Engineering," added Mavoa.

There was an interactive session between industry stakeholders and the University academics and students following Professor Sharma's presentation.

Students from the final year Bachelor of Engineering programme made brief presentations on their Capstone projects.

Similar meetings are scheduled fortnightly over the coming months for the various Engineering disciplines.