

# Changing times for UWI

**NO ONE** knows what the world will look like in 20 years' time. No one imagined 20 years ago that the world today would be as it is. We are being driven by technological change the likes of which we cannot fathom.

The new chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Robert Bermudez, made the point in his inaugural address last weekend during his official installation as the sixth chancellor. It is not just the change, rather the rapidity of change that could knock us off our perches if we aren't careful.

That fact fails to register with most people faced with the demands of daily life, but for individuals like Bermudez who risk all as owners of front-line businesses where the laissez faire of many State-run enterprises would mean ruination, remaining agile, cutting-edge and competitive is everything.

Putting that in the context of education is an enormous challenge when the process of education can only be described as an overloaded juggernaut, difficult to turn around quickly even with clear danger in sight. Calling for the UWI's strategic plan to be dynamic is to throw down the gauntlet before the entire education system in our region.

There was a discernible shuffle among those seated near me at the event when one speaker mentioned the fact that UWI had trained our public servants, lawyers, politicians

and leaders. Is it just the outmoded structures within our institutions and the workplace that have shaped the cussedness of too many of those bright ex-students who become the disempowered, too often bad-minded professionals with whom we have to interface, or is it a mindset? We all know that recognising the problem is part of the solution. The bigger question is how we go about changing it.

It was encouraging to know that the new chancellor, never having attended a university himself, believes it is the experience of tertiary-level learning as much as achieving academic qualifications that really matters and which will produce the sorts of energised, open-minded people we need to shape the future of the region.

It is an important point, especially as we consider how imperative it is to be engaged, critical thinkers in order to survive well in the fast-paced technological world we increasingly inhabit.

For too long the emphasis has been only on getting that piece of paper. The need to qualify will not go away, especially if we want to do research and/or pursue certain careers, but the powers of observation and enquiry, of curiosity, of discussion and thinking creatively about old problems and having empathy with others and their points of view are what we must give equal focus to.

As for the paper, no one, not

even an employer, ever asked me to see a single certificate of education I had worked hard to achieve.

An issue we must grapple with too is the chance of bigger sections of our populations falling behind in the relentless march of new technology. For today's top professionals who retire at the still useful age of 60 or even 65 (remember that we are tending to live much longer lives), staying abreast of constant and expensive technological change is compulsory in order to remain relevant to society and not get left behind.

My mother, once the consummate professional, still speaks resentfully about becoming a "has-been" and feeling demeaned. We will all be has-beens one day; some much younger than her already are. I for one just will not take on Facebook and Twitter, and other social media and am therefore already cut off from the hoi polloi.

And how do we deal with the 25 per cent of illiterate TT citizens, and even higher number in other islands? How can they be part of the dynamically changing new world?

Their growing isolation and resentments cannot be ignored.



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