A thrill for UOW old boy to work SMART

GREG ELLIS

University of Wollongong’s SMART Infrastructure Facility director Garry Bowditch is amazed at the visionary change that has occurred on the campus where he studied commerce as an undergraduate 25 years ago.

Mr Bowditch is trying to quickly familiarise himself with new surroundings that are the result of visionary leaders such as Vice-Chancellor Professor Gerard Sutton and his predecessor Prof Ken McKinnon.

He said it was a credit to them that Wollongong now has had a prestigious and nationally recognised university with a track record for achievement in innovation and global best capabilities.

Mr Bowditch said it made his return to Wollongong extremely exciting as he looked at how the scope of the $61.8 million SMART facility, now under construction, directly related to the rest of the university.

“When I came back and the vice-chancellor took me around the university I was without any reference points because there was basically nothing I recognised,” he said.

“The campus has changed so profoundly in not only its spread but also its height. It was quite breathtaking.”

Mr Bowditch’s parents still live in Corrimal and he has regularly visited Wollongong but he was still amazes at how much the university campus has changed.
“To think it has now got a law school, a medical school, a medical research facility and an innovation campus

“It was just a small regional university when I was here. I see the SMART Infrastructure Facility being an important part of the university. We are going to draw on the great expertise and the enormous credibility the university already has nationally and internationally.

“I was talking to a businessman in robotics in New York recently. I mentioned Wollongong in a passing reference and he knew all about our high-tech capabilities.”

Mr Bowditch said that emphasised the calibre of work being done at UOW.

“I guess the next generation of that work would be something Wollongong community would relate to because it looked at things from the customer or end-user perspective and focused on how everything interconnects.

“Wollongong people who regularly commute to Sydney for example don’t just think about one mode of transport,” he said,

“A family off for a lovely day in Sydney will probably use two to four modes of transport... and what we are really focused on is how all those services interconnect.

“It is easy to park at the train station and is it easy to move from the train to the bus? Is there a smooth and seamless transition as you undertake your own unique journey?

I think the industry and governments are now saying this is how people want to think about infrastructure. They don’t think about is at one individual piece, such as a tunnel or a road. It is about how all these things work together so you can do what you want.

“We’ll be using some very unique and globally significant computing power to be able to bring some deep insight, research and training to help governments do it better.”

Mr Bowditch said the new building was very exciting and conducive to such ground-breaking community-focused research.

“It is the size of a small aircraft carrier and the complexity that sits behind it will probably match one. When the community gets the opportunity to walk through I think there will be quite a few jaws left open.”

Mr Bowditch and chief operating officer Tania Brown are now recruiting and ensuring all technology and infrastructure is in place by early next year when the SMART building will accommodate up to 150 people.

They are identifying and securing professors to lead research initiatives.
“That will have a trickle-down effect because these intellectual leaders will be employing people and using facilities and services in the community,” said Mr Bowditch, who expects many spin-offs for Wollongong. “Once we establish this as the epicentre of research and training we will find that new companies will be coming to Wollongong to be near us ... they will recognise this is a cluster and as a centre of excellence. We also see a lot of compatibility with the Innovation Campus.”

“I am delighted to come home to a vision that is bigger than anything I ever imagined I would be involved in. And the epicentre of that vision is Wollongong.

“I’m here to champion the city’s credentials and to ensure that, as we start to kick goals, Wollongong is on the lips of every significant leader in infrastructure around the globe.”