

September 2025 • auckland.ac.nz/UniNews



Waipapa
Taumata Rau
**University
of Auckland**

UniNews

A portrait of Sallyann Harbison, a woman with long blonde hair, wearing a light-colored sweater with a repeating pattern of the Māori word 'hāri' and a small bird. She has her arms crossed and is smiling slightly. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

SALLYANN HARBISON

Life and crimes at the
forefront of forensic science

Page 6

ROBBIE PĀORA

Meet the University's
te reo Māori custodian

Page 3

SIGNATURE LOOK

Clarifying our key
research strengths

Page 9

BRICK MAN

Lego master
Andrew Battley

Page 12

IN THE NEWS

A selection of University staff and students who provided expert commentary in the media recently. Let us know! Email: uninews@auckland.ac.nz.



Saira Raza Khan

SCARE TACTICS IN HEALTH ADS

Images of lungs damaged by cigarette smoking and graphic drink-driving accidents have long been used by marketers to encourage us to make better choices. However, Dr Saira Raza Khan (Business School) told RNZ's Melissa Chan-Green it's time to rethink the use of scare tactics in advertising.

Link: tinyurl.com/khan-rnz-scare-tactics

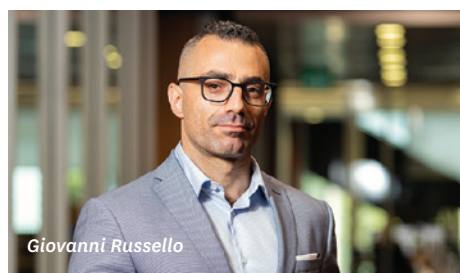


Michel Nieuwoudt

TECH TO DIAGNOSE SKIN CANCER

Dr Michel Nieuwoudt (School of Chemical Sciences, the Photon Factory) told the *National Business Review* about a handheld device that uses a laser technology to instantly diagnose skin cancer. Luminoma, a University spinoff company, is seeking to commercialise the invention, which uses raman spectroscopy, said Nieuwoudt.

Link: tinyurl.com/nieuwoudt-nbr-luminoma



Giovanni Russello

CHURCH-LINKED PHISHING EMAILS

Professor Giovanni Russello, the head of the School of Computer Science, told Pacific Media Network that phishing emails written in Pacific languages and framed as community or church requests for help were among the most convincing for Pacific recipients. He led research that simulated a phishing campaign.

Link: tinyurl.com/russello-pmn-phishing



Cheryl Ware

HISTORY OF SEX WORK REVIEWED

Historian Dr Cheryl Ware (Arts and Education) has had excellent coverage of her book *A History of Sex Work in Aotearoa, 1978-2008*. This includes interviews with RNZ's *Nights*, *The Post* and *NZ Booklovers*, extracts run in the *Sunday Star-Times*, *Kete Books* and the *Weekend Herald* and reviews by *Nine to Noon* and the *NZ Listener*.

Link: tinyurl.com/ware-rnz-book



Jenny Kruger

A WEE PROBLEM

RNZ's *Nine to Noon* talked to Dr Jenny Kruger (Auckland Bioengineering Institute) about urinary incontinence, which affects one-in-three women, but is often ignored. The message, as part of Women's Health Week: it's not inevitable, and there is something you can do about it – exercise those pelvic floor muscles.

Link: tinyurl.com/kruger-rnz-wee-chat



William Sheard

TURNING E-WASTE INTO GOLD

The *Sunday Star-Times* reported on William Sheard's research (with the story republished in the *Post*) that involves a scientific win-win-win. The PhD student is extracting valuable metals, such as gold, from e-waste while reducing the environmental risks posed by mercury run-off.

Link: tinyurl.com/sheard-post-ewaste

THIS ISSUE

Robbie Pāora	3
Good to Know	4-5
– HRC funding	
– Pacific Parkinson's Day	
– AI-powered te reo Māori tool	
– Three Minute Thesis winners	
Cover story: SallyAnn Harbison	6-7
Daniel Hepi	8
Signature Research Areas	9
Arts	10
Obituary: Keith Sorrenson	11
My Space: Andrew Battley	12

Cover photo: Chris Loufte

Editor: Caitlin Sykes
caitlin.sykes@auckland.ac.nz
Photography: Chris Loufte, William Chea
Design: Craig Berry
Production: University of Auckland
Volume 55 – Issue 7 – September 2025
Published by: Waipapa Taumata Rau,
University of Auckland
Communications Office,
Alfred Nathan House, 24 Princes Street,
Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142
Web: auckland.ac.nz/UniNews

Something to share? The next *UniNews* is October 2025, copy due 16 September.
Email: uninews@auckland.ac.nz

For the fortnightly Whāimōhio The Loop newsletter, email: staff-comms@auckland.ac.nz.
Deadlines are on the intranet under News, Events and Notices, The Loop.

When posted, *UniNews* is delivered in certified degradable EPI packaging in keeping with our sustainability goals. In PDF, this document has clickable links to any URLs.

THE TE REO MĀORI CUSTODIAN

Robbie Pāora grew up steeped in his language and culture – a path he continues to walk in his mahi as the University’s kaitiaki reo Māori.

Raised on his Ngāti Whātua marae of Rēweti and Ōrākei, Robbie Pāora grew up around his elders and with te reo Māori as his first language.

Aged just one year apart, he and his sister Majic were homeschooled and primarily ranged between Rēweti in Waimauku and the four other Ngāti Whātua marae in the southern Kaipara area.

“I was blessed,” says Robbie. “Today, those times have passed. Our culture is thriving a little more, but the old ways are gone – the old people, the old type of language.”

That upbringing, steeped in Māori language and culture, established the path for his mahi, which today includes being the University’s kaitiaki reo Māori in the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Māori.

Robbie was the first to take on the role at the University when he began in early 2024, and it’s broad ranging.

He oversees the University’s plan for the revitalisation of te reo Māori, ‘Te taonga nō tua whakarere, he taonga mo āpōpō’ (‘A treasure from ancient times, and for tomorrow’). The inaugural plan covered the years 2020 to 2025 and its first update is released this month, during Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori.

The language plan, he says, helps guide aspects of his job – such as the te reo Māori naming of buildings, initiatives and job titles across the University – to ensure they’re underpinned by guiding philosophies. Finding appropriate names for the kind of novel and boundary-pushing work that is undertaken at the University, he says, “always keeps me on my toes”.

He also oversees resources related to the language plan, such as Kuputaka – the glossary of terms and style guide for te reo Māori – and the Te Kūaha language resources app.

Alongside Honorary Associate Professor of Sociology Dr Avril Bell, he leads the eight-week professional development course Te Akoranga Kairangi; he covers the course’s te reo Māori and tikanga content, with Avril covering the history



Robbie Pāora became the University’s first kaitiaki reo Māori in 2024.

Photo: Chris Loufte

“I got into reading everything I could about Māori linguistics and grammar and it changed my whole view of the language.”

– Robbie Pāora, kaitiaki te reo Māori

of Māori/Pākehā relations. Kura Taumata Rau is another language and culture wānanga for staff that he runs, and he also guides City Campus history walks.

Language teaching is a passion. In 2015 he began what ultimately became a five-year role teaching te reo Māori, from beginner to full-immersion levels, at the Dunedin campus of Te Wananga o Aotearoa. With te reo Māori as his first language he had the fluency required for teaching, he says, but initially lacked a technical understanding of the language.

“A lot of tauira [students] would ask why something was the way it was, and I would say, ‘it’s just how it is’, but it wasn’t good enough,” he recalls. “So, I got into reading everything I could about Māori linguistics and grammar and it changed my whole view of the language. I was able to mould my more traditional style into something more technical, which really helps when you’re teaching to a curriculum.”

Robbie’s University role is half time, which he also balances with responsibilities he carries in his iwi. Mostly related to heritage preservation, these encompass teaching history and te reo Māori, naming and opening buildings across the city, and playing a role in annual events, such as Matariki and Waitangi Day (the latter marked on 20 March, when Ngāti Whātua signed the Treaty).

The spotlight that shines brightly on te reo Māori in the month of September, with events such as Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori and Mahuru Māori, comes with some sense of tension, he says; for many whose life and work is embedded in the language, it would be ideal for that spotlight to shine year-round. Still, as the guardian of te reo Māori on campus, it’s a busy time.

“People around the University are reaching out about events they’re organising and they go into our calendar. Then it’s just a matter of being there to support and saying, ‘How can I help?’”

■ Caitlin Sykes



Associate Professor George Laking will investigate a new model for breast cancer care.
Photo: Chris Loufte

RESEARCHERS AWARDED \$35.5M TO ADDRESS KEY HEALTH ISSUES

From optimising nutrition for very pre-term babies to closing the gaps in breast cancer care and outcomes for Māori women, some of the country's most pressing health challenges will be investigated through the Health Research Council's (HRC) latest funding round.

Leading researchers from the University have been awarded more than \$35.5 million in the HRC's 2025 round, with three major programmes receiving \$5 million each to undertake groundbreaking research.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation Professor Frank Bloomfield leads the 'Optimising nutrition for pre-term babies' programme at the University's Liggins Institute.

In the case of very pre-term babies, their only nutrition comes through feeding tubes to their veins. The programme will design new nutrition formulations to improve outcomes.

A key part of the programme aims to see if later learning and behavioural outcomes are altered by providing the smell and taste of milk in tube feeds. The goal is to save lives, reduce disability and enable pre-term babies to live healthier lives.

Another programme is led by Associate Professor George Laking of Te Aka Mātauranga Matepukupuku, the Centre for Cancer Research. He will work with collaborators and whānau to develop and test a new model of breast cancer care in Auckland and the Waikato, 'Whiria te

Aka Matua: A new and comprehensive model of breast cancer care for Māori women.'

Nearly half of all women with breast cancer are diagnosed outside the national screening programme through discovery of symptomatic breast cancer. The model aims to redress a major health inequity: Māori women with symptomatic breast cancer have a 37 percent greater risk of death than non-Māori women. The new model of care wants to fix gaps in accessing timely and holistic health care with a whānau-based approach.

Professor Ian Hermans of the Malaghan Institute of Medical Research will work with researchers at the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, including paediatrician Dr Kuang Hsiao, on the project 'Protecting vulnerable populations against measles outbreak with a new mRNA vaccine'.

The goal is to use the same mRNA technology that produced the Covid-19 vaccines to develop a new measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine for vulnerable groups. These include people with an impaired immune system, pregnant women and very young infants. These groups can't receive the current MMR vaccine.

Māori and Pacific peoples are over-represented in these groups, and a successful mRNA vaccine would be a valuable alternative to protect these communities in a measles outbreak.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/hrc-2025

PACIFIC FILM DIRECTOR SHARES POWERFUL PARKINSON'S MESSAGE

There were few dry eyes in the room when playwright and film director Toa Fraser shared his difficult and moving journey about living with Parkinson's at the inaugural Parkinson's Pacific Awareness Day.

Organised by honorary research fellow Dr Christina Buchanan, the Pacific Parkinson's Support Group and Parkinson's New Zealand, the event brought together people with Parkinson's, caregivers, family members, clinicians and academics.

A Distinguished Alumnus, Toa was diagnosed a decade ago with the disease, keeping it secret for five years, until the extent of his symptoms meant he could no longer stay silent. The co-executive producer and director of *Sweet Tooth* and *Murderbot* considered retirement at the age of 45.

"I've come to view my Parkinson's not as a living death, but actually as a blessing, a gateway to my authentic life," Toa said during his address at the event.

"It's possible to live a fulfilling, fruitful and useful life with Parkinson's – with professional support and with love."

Held at the Lotofale'ia Māngere Tongan Methodist Parish in Māngere on 26 July, the event aimed to break down stigma and honour the resilience of Pacific families living with Parkinson's disease.

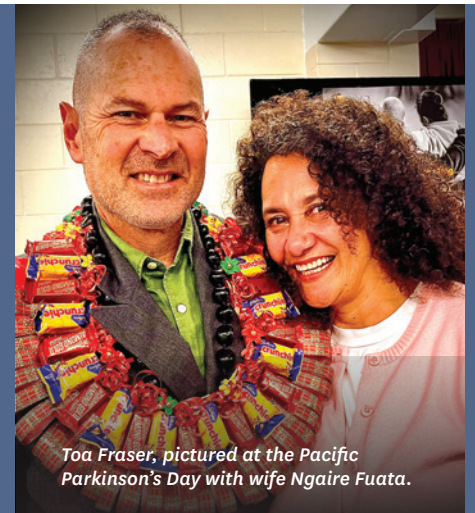
Parkinson's affects more than 10 million people worldwide and poses unique challenges for Pacific communities, including cultural stigma and late diagnoses, said Toa.

"Parkinson's is often seen as an old Palagi disease, which inhibits us from pursuing treatment. Silence can become our enemy."

Neurologist and University of Auckland honorary senior lecturer Dr Joseph Donnelly shared insights from his clinical experience and lessons he had learnt from his patients over the past few years.

He said on average, his team usually diagnoses two or three patients with the disease each week. Joseph explained that Parkinson's was often misunderstood, even within the medical community.

He also acknowledged the challenges Pacific communities face in accessing timely



Toa Fraser, pictured at the Pacific Parkinson's Day with wife Ngaire Fuata.

care due to stigma and misperceptions about the disease.

"Parkinson's is a complex neurological condition, but it is manageable. The key is early recognition and culturally safe support.

"We must ensure that Pacific families feel empowered to seek help, ask questions and receive care that respects their values and traditions."

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/pacific-parkinsons-day



Associate Professor Peter Keegan, Professor Catherine Watson, Dr Piata Allen and Dr Jesin James are part of the team developing a new AI-powered te reo Māori tool.
Photo: William Chea

AI TOOL TO IMPROVE TE REO MĀORI PRONUNCIATION GETS A BOOST

A new project led by the University is set to transform how te reo Māori is spoken and learned, thanks to a \$1 million research grant.

A three-year initiative will develop an AI-powered coaching tool to help learners

improve their pronunciation of te reo Māori, and offer personalised feedback in real time.

The project, funded by the Ministry of Business and Innovation's Smart Ideas, is co-led by Māori-medium educator and researcher Dr Piata Allen (Ngāti Kahungunu,

Ngāti Hinemanu, Ngā Wairiki Ngāti Apa) from the Faculty of Arts and Education and Dr Jesin James (Engineering and Design), who works in speech signal processing and machine learning.

The project brings together a multidisciplinary team of Māori language experts, linguists, engineers and computer scientists.

"This tool has the potential to be transformative for our reo and for education in Aotearoa," says Piata. "It will help people develop muscle memory for pronunciation and supports everyone who works with Māori names and communities to speak confidently."

Grounded in tikanga Māori, the tool could integrate with existing apps and be accessible to teachers, students, public servants, and anyone engaging with Māori communities.

Piata says pronunciation remains one of the biggest barriers for beginners.

"Even among those who are trying, many are not confident with pronunciation. We want to change that."

"This tool will support accurate pronunciation in a way that's empowering and supportive."

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/ai-te-reo-tool

HOT TOPIC TAKES TOP 3MT PRIZE

Cool roofs to combat the health impacts of climate change proved the winning topic in this year's Three Minute Thesis (3MT) final, held on 8 August.

The annual competition challenges students to share the story of their doctoral research in under three minutes with a general audience and the aid of a single, static slide. The 2025 winner was Dr Noah Bunkley.

The Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa, Centre for Pacific and Global Health researcher spoke about his thesis on painting roofs across four continents with a reflective coating, as part of research into tackling the health impacts of climate change.

Noah is managing the global REFLECT project, which is testing whether reflective white roof paint provides relief from extreme heat in Niue, Mexico, India and Burkina Faso.

"Cool roofs could be a climate change adaptation tool that might have huge benefits for the health of people in vulnerable communities," says Noah.

The runner-up was Rebecca O'Leary, whose thesis topic is representations of domestic violence in contemporary theatre.

Rebecca, from the Faculty of Arts and Education, hopes her research will contribute to turning the tide, so victims of family violence are heard, and social changes are made. Victims



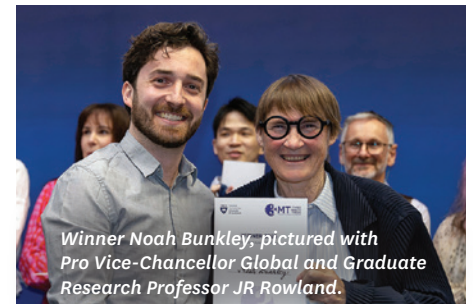
People's Choice Award winner Ross Millar. Photos: Chris Loufte

of domestic violence need more protection and support after they leave violent relationships, she says.

"Our legal and social systems do not serve victims well and often re-traumatise them, while our economic, social and cultural structures allow domestic violence to thrive," says Rebecca.

The People's Choice Award went to Ross Millar for his presentation on how to read and write sign languages.

Ross, from the Faculty of Science, says the idea for his research on creating a written sign



Winner Noah Bunkley, pictured with Pro Vice-Chancellor Global and Graduate Research Professor JR Rowland.



Runner-up Rebecca O'Leary

language was sparked when he was teaching basic computer skills to a group of deaf students.

"I asked the tutor how to write sign language and was told, 'You can't. Just use simple English'.

"I have not stopped thinking about it," he says. Since then, he has been developing a written sign language for the deaf community.

"I hope deaf people will start to read and write in their own languages. However, that is up to them," says Ross.

More: auckland.ac.nz/3mt-2025



Professor SallyAnn Harbison says she feels proud her work makes a real difference in people's lives. Photos: Chris Louffe

THE DNA DETECTIVE

Professor SallyAnn Harbison has seen huge advances in forensic science during her career, and continues working at the forefront of research helping link criminals with crime scenes.

“Forensic science never, ever stands still, so I am always learning.”

– Professor SallyAnn Harbison,
Faculty of Science

“I really wanted to be an astronaut,” confesses SallyAnn Harbison, a leading forensic scientist whose work has helped to solve many of New Zealand’s worst crimes.

“I still want to be an astronaut, and I haven’t given up.”

She’s left her run a bit late but, honestly, she just might not be kidding.

As an eight-year-old in Oxford, England, SallyAnn was a “child of the moon landing”, she says, awed by the grainy black-and-white images of the event on television in July 1969.

Genetics is her own scientific adventure, and today she’s the head of the Forensic Science Programme at the University of Auckland, and newly a professor. At the New Zealand Institute for Public Health and Forensic Science, she leads the forensic biologists who link criminals with crimes through blood, sweat, saliva, semen and other human traces.

“Forensic science never, ever stands still, so I am always learning” she says. “That’s why I love it. That and my young colleagues and students; it’s a joy to help them develop.”

An academic journey

SallyAnn grew up near the River Thames in Oxford in a house crammed with books, records and a piano. A shy girl, precociously talented

at reading, writing, maths and the piano, she watched *Match of the Day* with her mother and delved into her father’s extensive library – he was interested in everything, she says.

A childhood playground – almost a second home – was a college dating back to the 14th century called New College, known for gargoyles, cloisters and gardens, and featured in the movie *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Her father was on the professional staff.

“It was a fabulous childhood,” she says.

SallyAnn studied hard, and loved maths, chemistry and the arts, especially music. She became a devotee of J.R.R. Tolkien – the Oxford professor who wrote *The Lord of the Rings* – and Liverpool FC. The football team, a vibrant live music scene and a reputation for science, drew SallyAnn to the biochemistry department of the University of Liverpool at the tail end of the 1970s.

Peter Sutcliffe, the ‘Yorkshire Ripper’, was active in the North of England at the time, and students learned self-defence on arriving at halls of residence, she recalls.

SallyAnn cheered on Liverpool FC at home games for years, from a stand called The Kop; saw iconic bands like The Police, Madness and The Jam; and completed an honours project on proteins and RNA.

For her PhD, she investigated an RNA virus called Carnation mottle virus. Many years later, she would spend Christmas Day in a lab in Auckland analysing samples of another, similar-looking RNA virus, Covid-19.

In 1985, SallyAnn followed her partner to New Zealand and landed at the University of Auckland. She studied the genomics of White clover mosaic virus in Professor Richard Gardner's research group, collaborating with the-then Plant Diseases Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR).

Incredible advances in DNA

In 1988, she jumped to the Chemistry Division of the DSIR in Mount Albert. At that time, the DSIR was building up its DNA expertise after the discovery by UK scientist Alec Jeffrey of the 'DNA fingerprint' – aspects of DNA unique to each individual.

She'd never previously had anything to do with the police, but suddenly she was at crime scenes and soon she was giving evidence in court.

SallyAnn has seen and helped to implement incredible advances in forensic science, with DNA now extracted from samples as small as one-trillionth of a gram. When she started, scientists here could still only ascertain the blood group of an offender.

A defining case in her career was that of Malcolm Rewa, who was ultimately convicted of serial rapes, including the rape and murder of Susan Burdett in Papatoetoe in 1992. SallyAnn attended the Burdett crime scene and, as police struggled to solve the case, she and her colleagues advanced their DNA techniques to link the case with six rapes, and screened 5,000 men. She has given evidence in court five times in connection with the case.

"That crime scene is imprinted on my mind," she says. "I could draw it for you right now."

Rewa and a second prolific serial rapist offending simultaneously supported the case for establishing a DNA databank. This was introduced in 1995 along with police powers to compel DNA samples in some circumstances. Rewa's DNA was the first sample in the databank.

SallyAnn began teaching at the University in 1995, and many colleagues are former students, while others work around the world in senior roles. Today's students work to combat wildlife crime by identifying the origins of trafficked items such as elephant tusks, and develop AI agents to evaluate forensic evidence.

One study is investigating whether proteins can aid the often tricky task of linking an individual to a cartridge case. A shooter's limited DNA traces from briefly handling a bullet can vanish amid the heat and gunshot residue of firing. "We're going to give proteins a go, to see whether they survive

better," she says. Similar work is being undertaken for strands of hair, which contain limited DNA unless the root is attached.

'You'll never walk alone'

The job exacts a psychological toll, especially when the victims are particularly vulnerable, such as children, the elderly or the disabled. An unsolved case that SallyAnn hasn't forgotten, and may one day be cracked, is that of Betty Marusich, a homeless woman killed in Auckland's Domain in 1995.

Distance running helps with stress, including marathons and, inevitably, the Middle-earth Halfling Marathon at Hobbiton. She gets strength, too, from being a team player – 'you'll never walk alone' is the anthem of her beloved Liverpool FC – and from her pride in work that makes a real difference to people's lives.

In 2021, SallyAnn was named a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit. That year, she was also elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi, for leading the research and development of advances and innovation in forensic DNA and RNA analysis and being recognised internationally for casework-ready, accredited science for justice.

From that vantage point of experience, she offered younger members of the audience at her inaugural professorial lecture a handful of tips: be curious – to improve your life and give yourself options; find your tribe; be a team player; when you fall down, get back up and walk on (a Liverpool FC reference); and, of course, be a hobbit, not an orc.

And returning to space, it turns out SallyAnn did apply for a job at NASA – "not that long ago" – because she figured her forensic science experience might have been relevant for an anti-contamination role: "I haven't given up," she says.

"And I really don't want to hover on the edge of space; I want to go into space and orbit. Anyway, you can always send your ashes, accompanied by a David Bowie soundtrack, if the worst comes to the worst!"

■ Paul Panckhurst

"That crime scene is imprinted on my mind. I could draw it for you right now."

– Professor SallyAnn Harbison





Daniel Hepi, pictured with his partner Jada, mum and fellow kaiako Rahera and son Taiohia.

DANIEL HEPI: IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Three generations of Daniel Hepi's whānau are now involved with their kōhanga reo. But what makes Hineteiwaiwa a special place, he says, is how it embraces all tamaiti.

When Daniel Hepi joined Hineteiwaiwa Te Kōhanga Reo as a kaiako (teacher), it was a full-circle moment.

"I used to visit Hineteiwaiwa when I was about 13 and hang out with the tamariki during the school holidays," says Daniel. "My mum was, and still is, a kaiako there."

So, joining the full-immersion Māori early childhood service as a kaiako himself four years ago felt natural, says Daniel – "like stepping into a role I'd been preparing for all along".

The circle will turn fully again this month, as Daniel's 10-month-old son starts at Hineteiwaiwa, creating a three-generation connection to the kōhanga.

The magic of Hineteiwaiwa, however, isn't

just about his family's connection, says Daniel. "It's special because it embraces every tamaiti [child]; it takes a village to raise a child. I know my son, like every tamaiti who walk through these doors, will be surrounded by people who love him, teach him and truly see him."

Located next to Waipapa Marae, Hineteiwaiwa is the only kōhanga reo on the City Campus. Tamariki of parents who work or study at the University are engaged in a te reo Māori environment, preparing their pepeha and participating in pōwhiri, karakia and waiata.

Daniel's teaching style is shaped by his upbringing in kura kaupapa Māori environments, where students of all ages connected. "From kindy to high school, older students knew the little ones – that's just how it was. Whānau, tuakana-teina were part of everyday life."

Established more than 30 years ago, Hineteiwaiwa is a close-knit community, with 25 spaces for tamariki, and while most are from whānau Māori, the kōhanga reo welcomes all families committed to learning te reo and engaging with te ao Māori. Says Daniel: "We've had families come through with no reo background at all. It's their dedication to

learning that matters ... If you're open to it, Hineteiwaiwa is a beautiful place to start."

Although tamariki are immersed in te reo Māori, English is used as needed to ensure everyone feels included. "We focus on creating a safe space for both tamariki and their whānau to grow in the reo," he says.

Daniel recalls one special memory, during a face painting session at the kōhanga, which he says captures its spirit. Most tamariki chose superheroes or princesses, he says, "but one tamariki said, 'I want to be a leaf from that tree'. It was a moment of pure imagination. It showed the creativity and presence of our tamariki.

"That's what Hineteiwaiwa is all about – seeing potential in the smallest thing and nurturing it."

And sometimes the relationships that are formed there are quietly profound. Daniel recalls that when he first started as a teacher, he was worried that he hadn't fully connected with one tamaiti. "Then on his last day, he said, 'I'm going to miss you, Matua'. It hit me that I'd made a difference, even when I hadn't realised it."

Reflecting on his journey from visitor to kaiako and now a parent, Daniel sees Hineteiwaiwa as a part of his past, present and a foundation for his family's future. It reinforces his belief in the enduring role of the kōhanga in nurturing identity, connection and a sense of belonging.

Joelene Waugh, the University's general manager of early childhood services, says Daniel's experience exemplifies the team's commitment to Hineteiwaiwa.

"This team approaches their mahi with deep purpose and dedication. Daniel's story of personal and professional growth is beautiful and, importantly, it is not isolated. Every time I connect with this team and their whānau, the kōrero is rich with passion, always grounded in the values and vision that drive this space."

■ Holly Claeyes



Daniel at work with tamariki at the kōhanga.



Professors Nancy November and Cliona Ni Mhurchu want the process to define the University's Signature Research Areas to be as inclusive as possible.

Photo: Chris Loufte

RESEARCH AREAS PROJECT BEGINS

What are the University of Auckland's research strengths? A process is now underway to define and clarify our key areas of research excellence.

Professor Nancy November is a music historian specialising in chamber music of the late 18th and 19th centuries; Professor Cliona Ni Mhurchu leads a programme of nutrition and diet research.

Their fields look so far apart you might think they have little in common.

Maybe not, says Cliona, citing the example of doctoral candidate Anantha Narayanan, one-time music student and trainee vascular surgeon at the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (FMHS). His thesis topic? A randomised controlled trial to see if having music play during an operation lowers the stress of the operating surgeon. The trial proved inconclusive but shows the potential synergy between disparate disciplines.

Right now Nancy and Cliona are finding much more in common. As associate deans of research, respectively for the Faculties of Arts and Education, and FMHS, Nancy and Cliona are key members of the working group developing a consultative and robust process to create Signature Research Areas for the University.

Nancy has observed similar projects undertaken elsewhere.

"Research themes are part and parcel of quite

a few top-notch universities, like Oxford and Cambridge," she notes.

Nancy sees the Signature Research Areas working metaphorically, like a handshake the University can extend to peer institutions. "This will be a way to clarify partnerships, and from the outside, people looking in will understand what our research strengths are. And this, I'd think, will help build new pipelines in research funding."

As the project has unfolded, the pair have noted the many existing research collaborations between their faculties. Nancy sees the themes as a way to formalise connections and once formalised, the sum of those collaborations will offer a stronger proposition for communities, funders and the public.

Cliona agrees. "I see huge synergies with arts and education. The social sciences are key to advancing health and medicine research." She envisages projects in public health law with the Auckland Law School and has no doubt that marketing and business specialists in the Business School should be key partners in delivering health and well-being interventions that engage the public with marketing smarts.

At the moment, the shape of the Signature Research Areas is unknown. Nancy and Cliona are adamant: the quality of the outcome will be determined by the quality of the process.

"We're agreed broadly that there needs to be an ideation phase," says Nancy, "and then exchange across faculties and LSRIIs to develop research areas that reflect the entire University and make cross-faculty synergies visible."

To the outsider, and even for insiders like the two associate deans, the University's research landscape is complicated terrain. A key principle, says Cliona, is to be as inclusive as possible. At FMHS the process will entail focus

groups, workshops and school-based meetings. "My hope is that people will contribute in whatever way they feel most comfortable, and we get a broad representation of perspectives."

A second principle is that the themes reflect the land on which the University stands.

"My personal view is that these transdisciplinary areas absolutely and inevitably will include Māori and Pacific perspectives," says Cliona, "because we will be thinking about our distinct place in New Zealand and the Pacific."

Nancy says there can be a multitude of ways to intertwine Māori and Pacific knowledge and world views. "It may be that we bring cross-cutting expertise and methodology into the Signature Research Areas."

Ultimately Cliona says, "This has to be a bottom-up process, which has always been the approach. That's a strength of the University in that the academics have always had the freedom to explore new areas of research. The Signature Research Areas will definitely have to make space for the new and the innovative, alongside the established areas and expertise."

The project is ambitious in its goal to enhance the University's quest for research excellence in a time of constrained public investment in research. Nancy sees the Signature Research Areas as pragmatic and necessary. "Let's talk about the boring bit: one key driver is to create the pipeline to enhance external research funding."

A successful, research-intensive university is a magnet for talent and expertise and an environment that values depth of scholarship and creativity. "That's what we want," says Cliona, "a place of ambition and innovation. It would be fantastic if we were the Oxford or the MIT of the Pacific. Wouldn't that be great?"

■ Gilbert Wong

PHD CANDIDATE PRACTISES ART OF GIVING BACK

As a high school student, Jessie Lagaluga Hutchings (Avatele/Niue) stood at the crossroads between creative arts and health sciences.

Although she ultimately pursued pharmacy studies, her passion for visual storytelling never waned and a recent project has bridged the worlds of science and art in an act of reciprocity.

Her latest artwork, 'Hearts in Harmony' (pictured above right), was created as a gift for the participants in her PhD research and was recently on display in a group exhibition, called *Mark My World*, held at the Kim Meredith Gallery in central Auckland.

Jessie says she created the work to honour the voices and experiences of those who contributed to her research on Pacific heart-health equity and the role of community pharmacists.

"Creating the work shows the importance of their participation and hopefully will also serve as a reminder each time they see it. This research has been made possible because of their contributions," she says.



Jessie's artwork transforms thematic findings from her doctoral research into visual motifs. Each lily in the series represents a distinct data set: Pacific service users and their families; community pharmacists; and general practitioners. Within each lily, concentric rings depict themes drawn from interviews and focus groups.

Each design in the work conveys a multilayered story of resilience, collaboration and transformation.

Floral and plant motifs symbolise the relationships that sustain equitable cardiovascular care; navigational elements such as seabirds, stars and solar cycles highlight the journey toward accessible healthcare; and patterns of shark teeth and fish bones depict systemic barriers Pacific peoples face – from fragmentation to under resourcing.

"In the Pacific, the ocean doesn't divide – it connects," explains Jessie.

"This image of the ocean became a metaphor

for my entire PhD. The Pacific service users and families are the sky, ever-present and overarching. General practitioners are the earth, grounding the research in New Zealand's healthcare system. Community pharmacists emerged as connectors, bridging the gap between service users and practitioners."

The exhibition opening was attended by family, friends, doctoral supervisors and even Jessie's former art teacher from Selwyn College.

"My art teacher was disappointed I chose health sciences," she says. "It was great to finally show them my work."

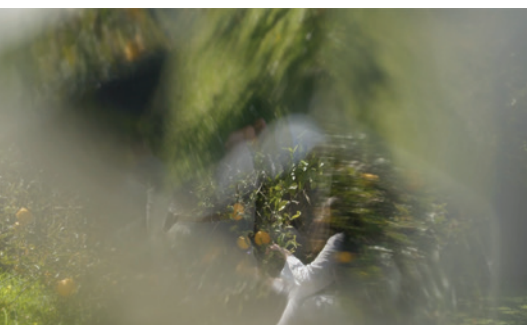
Jessie credits her supervisors Dr Trudi Aspden, Dr Corina Grey and Dr Karen Brewer for supporting her interdisciplinary approach.

"Trudi always believed in the value of creating art from this research, whereas some might not see it the same way.

"I've taken multiple voices and experiences and shaped them into overarching themes. That's what art does."

ELAM WORK ON SHOW IN VIDEO EXHIBITION

Exploring themes of the natural world, embodiment and duration, *Dialogues in Video Art: Works from the Chartwell Collection and Elam Artists* brings together video works by leading artists like Sriwhana Spong and Phil Dadson with new works by Elam School of Fine Arts students.



Lucy Jobbins, 'Sea Snails', 2024 (still)

The exhibition, now on at the George Fraser Gallery, is a collaboration between the University and the Chartwell Collection, one of the country's most significant collections of contemporary art. It features 14 works by Elam students, alongside 11 works from the Chartwell Collection on loan from Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

The exhibition came about after the conversion of the gallery's backroom into a video presentation space for doctoral exams, says assistant curator Audrey Goggin, a second-year Bachelor of Fine Arts student.

"Simon Ingram, director of the Master of Fine Arts programme, had the idea to create a video art project to make the most of this newly darkened space," she says.

This coincided with US art historian and curator Alex Bacon being hosted by Simon at Elam as a Visiting Scholar. Alex was looking for a local project and, keen to create an opportunity for him and the students, Simon made the pitch to Sue Gardiner at the Chartwell Collection for a joint exhibition.

Then once the idea got the green light, Alex came on board as curator and relished the chance to become more involved with the local art community.

Alex says it's been wonderful to see the

diversity and rigour of the practices of both established and emerging artists.

"This exhibition has been a great opportunity to learn more about the local scene by engaging with its foremost art school and art collection. In particular, it was nice to work with the strong subset of moving image works held within the Chartwell Collection."

He says such works have long been an important part of the collection, but this is the first exhibition to foreground them.

"By placing them in dialogue with student work, we are able to demonstrate the continued vitality of video art in Aotearoa."

Alex will also lead workshops with participating Elam artists, and texts based on those conversations will be published on the Chartwell Collection's website.

■ Julianne Evans

***Dialogues in Video Art: Works from the Chartwell Collection and Elam Artists* is on at the George Fraser Gallery, 25 Princes Street. It is presented in two parts; the first rotation ran in August and the second runs 17–26 September, with the exhibition open Wednesdays to Fridays, from 11am to 4pm. Details about the exhibition's events can be found on Instagram @elamgalleries.**



Keith Sorrenson pictured with his wife Judith and two of his grandsons, Peter (left) and David (right).

KEITH SORRENSON: SUPPORTING THE STRENGTH OF OUR HISTORY

I was one of the many students privileged to be taught in the University's history department by Emeritus Professor of History M.P.K. (Keith) Sorrenson, who died on 26 July, aged 93.

As a teacher, Keith instilled in me, as he did with many other students, a passion for history and a respect for knowledge, evidence and critical thinking. He later became my valued colleague from 1988.

Keith was born in 1932 and identified with both his Māori (Ngāti Pukenga) and Pākehā heritage, shaping his lifelong scholarly interests in race relations and cultural interactions in New Zealand.

He grew up on a farm in upper Papamoa, Tauranga, and completed his masters degree at the University of Auckland in 1955. His MA thesis on the purchase of Māori lands from 1865 to 1892 was later described by historian Dame Judith Binney as a "pioneering work without parallel".

Keith was a junior lecturer in the University's history department from 1957 to 1958, after which he undertook his doctorate on African history at Oxford, graduating in 1962. He then went to Makerere University in Uganda from 1963 to 1964, furthering his research interests in colonial and inter-racial history. On returning to New Zealand, he took up a lectureship at Auckland in 1964, speedily being appointed to a chair in 1968, which he held until he retired to become an historical consultant for the Waitangi Tribunal in 1995. During his career he always sought to connect with scholars internationally, particularly in the UK, North America and Africa.

In 1997, the *New Zealand Journal of History*, of which Keith had been associate editor and then co-editor, produced a festschrift for him.

This included a tribute from Professor Alan Ward, who, like Keith, had been central to the reappraisal of New Zealand's colonial history, beginning in the 1970s. Alan noted that the 1960s and 1970s were exciting decades in which New Zealand history went from strength to strength and that, in their exploration of Māori-settler interactions, Keith, along with others such as Judith Binney, made significant contributions, both as teachers and researchers.

Keith also performed a conscience-of-society role as an active member of the Citizens Association for Racial Equality (president 1971–1973); he petitioned then-prime minister Norman Kirk in 1972 against a proposed Springbok Tour and joined protests opposing the 1981 visit.

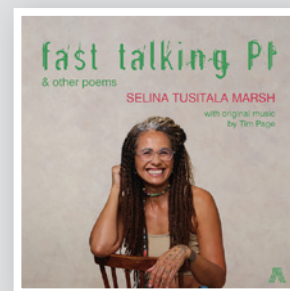
In 1986 he was appointed a member of the Waitangi Tribunal and was a panel member on 14 tribunal inquiries, contributing immensely to the writing of many tribunal reports.

Keith also instilled a passion for history in his son Richard, who undertook a PhD in the History of Science at Princeton University before returning to New Zealand and managing the University of Auckland Foundation and its endowment fund.

In Keith's final book in 2014, *Ko te Whenua te Utu/Land is the Price: Essays on Māori History, Land and Politics*, which collected his formative essays in one place, he modestly pointed out that his is not the last word; that historians constantly 'refashion' history. He is right, but this does not belittle the enormous contribution he made to the historical endeavour.

Keith is survived by his wife Judith, their three children, three grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

■ Professor Linda Bryder



Audiobook: Fast Talking PI and Other Poems

This audiobook features Commonwealth Poet Laureate Professor Selina Tusitala Marsh performing 36 of her most powerful poems, including selections from the collections *Fast Talking PI*, *Dark Sparring* and *Tightrope*. The poems are set to music by longtime University technician lead Tim Page.

Selina Tusitala Marsh, Auckland University Press, available on Spotify, Libro and Audible



If We Knew How To We Would

Emma Barnes' second poetry collection traverses breakups, a pandemic, health issues and deaths. Described as a 'riveting, overflowing

and grief-stricken reckoning with the ordinary', it follows the Wellington-based poet's first collection, *I Am in Bed With You* (2021), which was also published by Auckland University Press.

Emma Barnes, Auckland University Press, \$25, released on 11 September



Hooked Up

FMHS alumna, award-winning author and former GP Fiona Sussman's latest thriller draws on the world of reality TV. Featuring the detective duo from her fourth

novel, *The Doctor's Wife*, *Hooked Up* is described as highlighting the darker side of the reality TV industry – exposing some of the culture behind show production, and society's seemingly insatiable appetite for real-time drama.

Fiona Sussman, Bateman Books, \$39

MY SPACE

PhD student Andrew Battley surrounded by a few of his Lego creations.
Photos: Chris Louffe

BRICK MAN

Did you know the University has its very own Lego master?

Chemical sciences PhD candidate Andrew Battley's love of Lego began when he was a toddler and took him all the way to the finals of the second series of *Lego Masters New Zealand*. Lego still helps him unwind from study pressure – and brightens the City Campus office he shares with colleagues. “I’ve always liked to have things that I love around me,” he says, “and the main vessel for that is Lego bricks.”

When did you begin playing with Lego?

I must have been about three. The first set we have, which I suspect my parents bought for themselves rather than my brother and I, was a model of a passenger ferry that they went on in Sweden. We still have it on the shelf at home.

How did you evolve from building Lego sets to making your own creations?

It just comes from play. When we were children, we weren't thinking, ‘Oh, we're designing something.’ It was just, ‘We've got these pieces from the set. Let's throw them together and make a story.’ It was a way to play out stories with characters and it grew from there.

How much Lego do you own?

A lot. Most of it is in my parents' basement. It was built up through buying sets when we were children, and in recent years, I've started buying individual parts. I'm also part of the Auckland Lego User Group, and together we sometimes buy bulk parts.

You're doing a PhD. How does Lego fit into your academic life?

It's mostly a source of relaxation – a way to step away from the studies. But sometimes I go too far in that direction – like taking months off to go on a TV show!

How did the opportunity arise to compete on *Lego Masters New Zealand*?

I was at a birthday celebration for one of my friends and we'd noticed that TVNZ was calling for people to go on *Lego Masters*. We both love Lego and we joked about going on the show, then the next day we messaged and said ‘Should we just go for it?’ We didn't think we were really at that level, but we thought we may as well try.

There was an application process, where you sent in photos of your work. At the time I was working on a massive Hogwarts Castle, because I'd always liked *Harry Potter*, trying to make something that captured the stories from my imagination. Then there was an audition process that involved a mini challenge. My build partner and I ended up auditioning alongside another team that made it to the final, so it was cool to go through that full journey together.

What are some of the models you have in your space?

They fluctuate. The floating islands are a relatively recent addition. It's a model that embodies my design process. I had no plans to make it; I just started putting pieces together and seeing how they looked. I describe it as my style of ‘vibes-based building’.

In contrast, there's my Auckland Museum model, which I built last year for the Auckland Brick Show – an annual convention where people who love Lego come together and show the things they've built. The organisers wanted a set to sell at the show that everyone would recognise as being from Auckland. I took inspiration from the shape of the museum and tried to model it as accurately as possible. People who went along to the event could buy one of these sets and have it on the shelf at home.

And then there's a little model that I built of me in my chemistry lab, complete with its own rotary evaporator.

■ Caitlin Sykes

