JUNE 2026

Waipapa Taumata Rau
University of Auckland

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Something to share? The next *UniNews* is July 2026, copy due 9 June.
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For the fortnightly Whaimōhio The Loop newsletter, email: staff-comms@auckland.ac.nz.
Deadlines are on the intranet under News, Events and Notices, The Loop.

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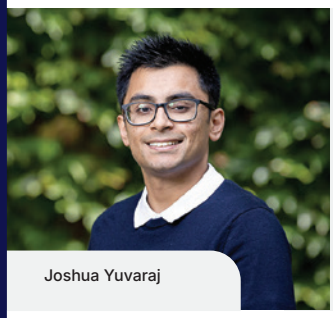
IN THE NEWS

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



Joshua Yuvaraj

Dua Lipa vs Samsung: can she protect her image?

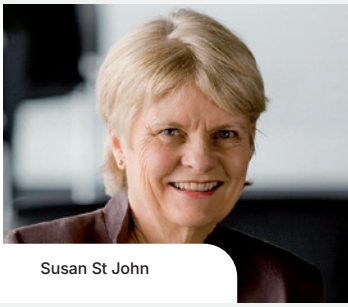
Pop star Dua Lipa is suing Samsung for US$15 million, alleging the electronics giant used her image to sell televisions by plastering her face across its packaging. Senior law lecturer Joshua Yuvaraj discussed whether Dua's image can be protected under intellectual property law with RNZ's Lisa Owen.

tinyurl.com/yuvaraj-rnz-dua-lipa

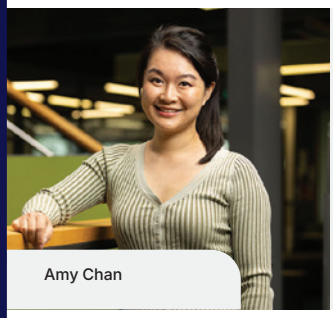
Where to for NZ Super?

Business School Honorary Associate Professor Susan St John told *The Front Page* podcast that raising the eligibility age for NZ Super would worsen inequality. The degree of hardship and poverty is getting worse, she said, "but we've got this payment that seems to be going to people who don't, strictly speaking, need it at all."

tinyurl.com/st-john-front-page-nz-super



Susan St John



Amy Chan

Smartwatch for asthma

Associate Professor Amy Chan (School of Pharmacy) has built an algorithm that uses smartwatch data to predict asthma attacks. "It gives an objective way to say, 'Hey, this is the likelihood of you having an attack in the next seven days, we really suggest that you keep a close eye," she told RNZ's *Morning Report*.

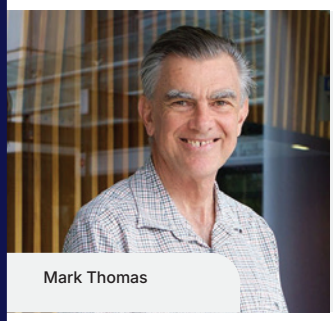
tinyurl.com/chan-rnz-smartwatch-asthma

Following the path of Te Pahi

Distinguished Professor Dame Anne Salmond (Arts and Education) was interviewed for an RNZ video documentary about Te Pahi (died 1810). The Ngāpuhi rangatira played a crucial role in the period of early contact between Māori and Europeans and travelled to Sydney in 1805 as a guest of the New South Wales governor.

rnz.co.nz/video/te-pahi

Dame Anne Salmond



Mark Thomas

Hantavirus risk low in New Zealand

Associate Professor Mark Thomas (Medical and Health Sciences) talked to RNZ about the hantavirus outbreak. He said the virus was carried by small mammals in many parts of the world, but wasn't present in New Zealand rodents. Infected people did not transmit the virus to other people, he said.

tinyurl.com/thomas-rnz-hantavirus

All about evolution

Dr Peter Wills (Department of Physics) told RNZ *Afternoons* about research supporting the theory that evolution occurs largely in short bursts, rather than as a gradual, continual process. The prestigious science and maths publication *Quanta Magazine* selected the study as one of the biology breakthroughs of 2025.

tinyurl.com/wills-rnz-evolution

Peter Wills

Hood Fellow Professor Russell Foster (second from left) with members of the University's chronobiology research group, Associate Professor Guy Warman, Dr Nicola Ludin, Dr James Cheeseman and Dr David Cumin.

Shedding light on sleep science

Research into sleep and teen mental health in Sāmoa and Aotearoa New Zealand has been boosted by a visit from Professor Russell Foster of the University of Oxford.

Russell is a leading circadian neuroscientist and his month-long visit was supported by the University of Auckland Foundation's Hood Fellowship.

The fellowship was applied for by Dr Nicola Ludin, who is a chronobiology scientist in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences.

"The main project we have been working on is a Pacific project, which is all about SCRD, [an abbreviation] that Russell came up with for sleep and circadian rhythm disruption, in youth mental health," says Nicola.

"We can use sleep solutions for the treatment and prevention of things like depression and anxiety."

To conclude the Oxford professor's Auckland visit, the University's chronobiology team held a celebration lunch in early May, which was also attended by Oxford University Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey.

Research shows sleep problems are overwhelmingly associated with poor teen mental health, says Nicola, and improving sleep can be part of the solution. Sleep problems are common and biologically influenced, but sleep is modifiable, and even small behaviour changes can make a meaningful difference to well-being.

"Education and the clever use of technology can make a real difference to teenagers' sleep quality and get better outcomes for depression and anxiety."

Associate Professor Guy Warman and Nicola, members of the University's chronobiology research group, travelled to Sāmoa with Russell to meet government and academic leaders.

Members of a TVNZ crew also joined the trip, filming for part of a wider documentary on sleep and circadian rhythms. The research group features prominently in the documentary, which is expected to air in August.

"One of the key priorities in Sāmoa is lifting numeracy and literacy for young people," says Nicola. "We talked a lot about how sleep can play an important role in that."

Nicola co-leads the project with Li'amanaia Dr Roannie Ng Shiu, co-director of Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa, the Centre for Pacific and Global Health. They are seeking funding for a youth mental health survey in Sāmoa to complement an adult survey and get an idea of the current prevalence of issues.

During his visit, Russell gave a public lecture at the National University of Sāmoa. In New Zealand, he delivered a public lecture at the Grafton Campus, hosted a schools outreach day, gave lectures to clinicians and students, and worked with Nicola on her research and potential collaborations to fund the Sāmoan research.

A highlight of the visit was a daylong symposium at Old Government House for the University-based chronobiology research group, which brings together a diverse range of scientists from different disciplines and institutions.

Russell says he was impressed by both the quality and breadth of chronobiology research at the University.

"Led by Associate Professor Guy Warman and Dr James Cheeseman, the group is collaborating on diverse and multifaceted projects that bring together scientists from different institutes and departments."

Jodi Yeats

Tips for teen sleep

- Keep a regular wake-up time every day, including weekends, to reduce 'social jet lag' and help stabilise the body clock.
- Get outside into natural light as early as possible in the morning, as morning light is the strongest signal for resetting the circadian system.
- Aim to keep weekends similar to weekdays, rather than sleeping very late, which can delay the body clock and make Monday mornings harder.
- Create a consistent wind-down routine before bed to help the brain transition from alertness to sleep.
- Use the bedroom mainly for sleep, rather than for studying, gaming or scrolling, to help the brain associate the space with resting.
- Gradually bring bedtime earlier in small steps, rather than making sudden, unrealistic changes.
- Avoid naps, if possible, especially late in the day, as they can reduce sleep pressure at night.
- Sleep in the dark and minimise light exposure at night.
- Use sleep education or evidence-based tools such as cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia, including digital or app-based options, which have been shown to improve sleep and mental health.
- Remember that better sleep supports mood, learning, memory, exam performance and sports performance, and poor sleep can reinforce anxiety and negative thinking.
- Take a whole-whānau approach where possible, with families supporting regular routines and sleep-friendly environments.

Restored whakairo welcomed

Members of the Henare whānau pictured with the restored whakairo at the ceremony.

In a dawn ceremony on 19 May held alongside the Henare whānau, Waipapa Taumata Rau welcomed the restored pou and whakairo back to the James Henare Research Centre, on the City Campus.

Among those present were Mātua Bernard Henare, chair of the James Henare Research Centre and son of Sir James Henare, and Peeni Henare, mokopuna of Sir James, who spoke on behalf of the whānau. Their presence connected the ceremony back to the rangatira whose name, legacy and vision continue to guide the centre.

The whakairo at the centre's entrance were originally created more than 30 years ago under the direction of tohunga whakairo Dr Pakāriki Harrison, then artist-in-residence at the University and the master carver who oversaw the construction of Tāne-nui-a-Rangi, the wharenui at Waipapa Marae.

The works were carved by Pakāriki and his then-teenage son Fred Harrison, with some of the original carving done using stone chisels, linking traditional and contemporary knowledge and technology.

The carvings were removed around 2014 after the wood suffered rot. Their restoration and return helps preserve and protect the tapu and mauri of the centre, while visibly reaffirming its purpose as a Māori research space.

James Henare Research Centre director Dr Tia Dawes says the carvings are central to the identity of the space as a Māori research centre, which is focused on the well-being of its people in Tāmaki and Te Tai Tokerau.

"They will clearly signal that it's a Māori research centre and help create the mauri of the space," he says.

Representing a return and a continuation, Fred Harrison (Ngāti Porou) restored the carvings that he first worked on alongside his father – this time with the help of his daughter, Aniwa Harrison.

"They should reach 100 years and still retain their original mauri and look and feel," says Fred. "They will remain transmitters and receivers of the knowledge of the people who pass through."

Full story:
auckland.ac.nz/jhrc-whakairo

Obituary: Professor Alistair Gunn

15 December 1958 – 10 May 2026

University of Auckland Professor Alistair Jan Gunn, a pioneer of groundbreaking treatment studies in fetuses and newborns, died suddenly at Auckland hospital on 10 May at the age of 67.

Alistair and I have been co-directors of the University's Fetal Physiology and Neuroscience Group. Alongside his role as a research professor, Alistair had worked as a paediatrician in endocrinology at Starship Children's Hospital since 1999.

He was a pre-eminent leader in fetal and neonatal perinatal neuroscience, a speciality focusing on babies' brain development from conception through their early days.

His pre-clinical and clinical studies led to the optimisation and implementation of brain cooling, now known as therapeutic hypothermia, for newborn babies who suffer from oxygen deprivation at birth.

The treatment involves chilling the brain for 72 hours after birth. This reduces the amount of oxygen the baby's brain needs, thereby potentially preventing further damage. It is currently the only standard international clinical therapy designed to reduce brain injury and improve infant survival.

It has saved countless lives and enabled millions of babies to thrive in this world without disability. Work on this therapy is ongoing to expand its use to younger and less severely injured babies.

The Fetal Physiology and Neuroscience Group is also developing new treatments and methods for detecting when fetuses and newborns are at risk of brain injury.

Alistair's research and clinical successes have been recognised by many awards and prizes. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand in 2009, and received the MacDiarmid Medal in 2014 and the Health Research Council's prestigious Beaven Medal in 2017.

He and I received the NZ Association of Scientists' Shorland Medal in 2017, with colleagues Associate Professors Joanne Davidson and Justin Dean and Professor Colin Green.

In 2024, he was awarded the Royal Australasian College of Physicians Howard Williams Medal and he was recently made an honorary fellow of the US-based Newborn Brain Society, for his outstanding contributions to our understanding and practice of neuroprotection of the newborn.

Alistair was a cherished colleague, friend and mentor. His colleagues remember him as curious, kind hearted and generous in sharing his skills and knowledge.

Many in the department will remember him occasionally walking down the corridors, a draft research paper in one hand, and a team member's baby in the other, soothing their crying. He loved babies and they loved him, or his beard at least.

Colleagues around the world have sent messages of condolence and they all say the same thing: Al was a clever, kind guy with a unique sense of humour. His scientific insight, openness and commitment to perinatal brain research and mentoring was an inspiration to us all.

He was a leading research star – a legend – and will be sorely missed by all.

Alistair is survived by his wife, Diana, four children and four grandchildren.

Professor Laura Bennet
Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences

Major revamp for health programmes

Dean of the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Professor Warwick Bagg

The University has announced the most significant overhaul of its undergraduate health offerings in decades.

The major redesign is intended to create clearer and more flexible pathways into a wide range of health careers and strengthen the foundations required for clinical roles.

The changes will take effect from 2027 and are designed to broaden student choice, improve equity and well-being, and ensure graduates are well prepared for the evolving needs of New Zealand's health system.

Key programme changes include a new Bachelor of Biomedical Science, which will prepare students for careers in research and innovation through an integrated curriculum linking the science of disease with real-world diagnosis and treatment.

A refreshed Bachelor of Health Sciences will offer new majors in health systems and data analytics, and community health, alongside the option to double major in nutrition, preparing graduates to improve healthcare delivery, shape policy and support healthier communities.

An expanded Bachelor of Science will offer six health-related majors: three new options in cell and molecular bioscience, medicinal chemistry and nutrition, alongside existing majors in pharmacology, physiology and exercise sciences. These are designed to broaden pathways into research and an array of non-clinical careers.

Dean of the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences Professor Warwick Bagg says the redesign delivers strong, standalone qualifications that build future-focused skills and give students robust career options beyond clinical work.

"Our health system is facing increasingly complex challenges, and health careers are evolving," says Warwick.

"As an education provider, we have a responsibility to prepare students not just for today's workforce, but for what lies ahead.

"These redesigned programmes open up new possibilities for students and support the development of modern skills and new ways of thinking needed across the health sector."

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/undergrad-health

Satellite mission gets a boost

Dr Ben Taylor inspects the TPA-2 satellite in the Space Institute cleanroom.

The University's Te Pūnaha Ātea Space Institute has received $283,827 for its TPA-2 satellite mission.

Along with projects from Dawn Aerospace and the University of Canterbury, the mission is one of three projects funded in the first round of the New Zealand Space Agency's Kiwi Space Activator pilot programme.

Collectively, the projects have received $1.48 million in round one of the two-round scheme, Space Minister Hon Chris Penk announced on 15 May.

"These projects address real-world challenges identified by government agencies, and boost New Zealand's reputation as a hub for space innovation," he says.

"This pilot is a stepping stone, allowing us to develop New Zealand's space capabilities and support innovative projects that could contribute to a national space mission in the years ahead."

TPA-2 mission lead Dr Ben Taylor says the investment strengthens the institute's ability to deliver in-orbit demonstration missions for partners across the space sector.

"The funding will provide an effective pathway for commercial, academic and educational missions that add real economic and societal benefits," he says.

The TPA-2 mission builds on the heritage of the Space Institute's TPA-1, a successful loaf-sized satellite that is currently operating in orbit.

Ben says the team is now focused on extending that capability to support the wider New Zealand space community.

"We've shown we can deliver successful space missions with our TPA-1 satellite, and now we want to leverage this expertise to enable the wider New Zealand ecosystem and strengthen sovereign capability."

The mission will carry a modular maritime domain awareness payload, an optical satellite beacon, an in-house avionics suite and a biological experiment platform.

A payload slot will also be reserved for a school project with Auckland students actively developing mission systems, offering hands-on engagement for emerging space innovators.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/tpa-2

Crossing the stage

Here are a few of the stories behind some of Autumn's amazing graduates.

Luis Medrano Gomez, PhD in Architecture, Faculty of Engineering and Design

As Luis Medrano Gomez prepared to start his undergraduate architecture studies in Mexico, life was upended.

His sister Hany, 12 years his junior, was diagnosed with cancer.

It was the beginning of a long and tumultuous journey for the family, unfolding across Mexico, treatment trips to the US, and eventually Luis's doctoral studies in New Zealand.

On 4 May, that journey reached a milestone when Luis, now 34, graduated with a PhD from the School of Architecture and Planning.

Luis started his doctoral studies just as the pandemic began. With borders closed he completed his first year remotely in the US then in 2022, when borders reopened, he had to make the tough choice to travel to New Zealand at the same time Hany received a fresh cancer diagnosis.

"A lot of my friends and family were telling me, don't go to New Zealand. She had been fighting cancer for ten years at that point.

"I had a chat with her and she told me, 'I don't want this to affect your PhD. You've been with me all this time. It's time for you to follow your dreams'."

Luis took time out of his studies to be with Hany for three months before she passed away on 17 July 2024. A year on, working through intense grief and setback, Luis submitted his PhD on what would have been her 22nd birthday.

"My first motivation to study a PhD was to be able to help my sister and my mum when I had the chance. Now I'm planning to keep going with that promise to my mum while always remembering my sister."

Rosetta Stone, conjoint Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Music, Faculty of Arts and Education

University of Auckland graduate and 95bFM breakfast show host Rosetta Stone swapped her mic for a gown and trencher when she crossed the stage to receive her conjoint Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Music degrees.

Rosetta, who majored in Communications and Popular Music, is a familiar voice to thousands of listeners each morning on New Zealand's longest-running student radio station. She says graduating was a grounding reminder of her achievements so far.

"It feels really special to reflect on the pathway that led me to bFM, and the way university study has deepened my connection to music, media and community."

She moved from Wellington to Auckland in 2022 to begin her studies at Waipapa Taumata Rau, enrolling in a conjoint degree that allowed her to pursue a wide variety of interests.

Her connection to 95bFM began in her second year, when she joined the station as a news writer, and in turn discovered her second whānau.

"bFM is full of passionate, dedicated people – a safe haven for nerds and freaks," she says. "It's a real taonga. There's so much within Aotearoa music, student culture and the Auckland underground scene that exists and thrives because of bFM."

Candice Tait, PhD in Finance, Faculty of Business and Economics

Candice Tait's first business launched (unofficially) in Johannesburg when she was 11.

She knocked on doors, found customers and put her brother to work washing cars.

"I also washed quite a few myself and waitressed for several years."

Her entrepreneurial spirit and financial acumen eventually led her to a career that involved raising over $2 billion for start-ups, launching a business supporting female founders and graduating with a PhD in finance.

Her research examines how responsible investing operates across different markets and the impact of private equity on businesses and sustainability. It explores shareholder pressure on environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues and finds that, in New Zealand's private markets, investors are keen on responsible investing. However, many lack a clear picture of how well their investments perform on ESG measures. Her research data also showed female investors place more emphasis on ESG issues than men.

"And because there are so many more male investors than female, the weighting of the female perspective on sustainability isn't being reflected in decision-making."

In 2024, she also launched her business, Founded to be Counted, where she works exclusively with female founders, providing financial education, financial modelling and support for raising capital.

Her motivation has grown since having her daughter Maggie, now almost two. "Every time I think about the real purpose of what I'm doing, it's for her."

Ryan dos Santos Meechan, PhD in Speech Science, Faculty of Science

Communication is a matter of justice for new PhD graduate Ryan dos Santos Meechan (Whakatōhea).

Ryan works in a highly specialised area of speech-language therapy, supporting people going through the justice system who may have learning, language or communication difficulties, including those with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, known as FASD.

His role is to help ensure people can understand legal processes and communicate with lawyers.

"I want to ensure that people are getting a fair trial, so that they can effectively participate in their own justice," he says.

Ryan's journey into speech-language therapy began with a love of language.

While living in France, he became interested in multilingualism and the way language works in the brain. When he returned to Aotearoa, he studied a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science conjoint in French, psychology and linguistics, before completing a Master of Speech Language Therapy.

Ryan's PhD research focused on aphasia, a language impairment that commonly occurs after stroke or brain injury and which can affect a person's ability to understand, speak, read or write.

He hopes to develop equitable, accessible and culturally relevant tools and resources for Māori with communication difficulties, while also encouraging more people to consider speech-language therapy as a pathway.

"I would like to help upcoming Māori interested in this area to get into research, and support more Māori research."

Full stories: auckland.ac.nz/grad-stories

Activating Māori entrepreneurs

Kaiārahi Abigail McClutchie proudly ticked off a life goal on her list in the Autumn graduation.

Photo: Chris Loufte

At high school in Manurewa in 1980, 15-year-old Abigail McClutchie (Te Rarawa, Ngāti Porou) was awarded the school prize for human biology. Soon after, she visited the careers counsellor to discuss her options.

"I told them, 'I want to be a teacher or a doctor'. But the response was, 'Oh, why don't you just become a hairdresser like your friends?'"

Despite the discouragement, she went on to achieve her goals, becoming both a teacher and most recently a doctor – although not the medical kind she initially imagined.

On 6 May, Abigail crossed the stage to receive her PhD in Māori entrepreneurship. It was the culmination of a decade's effort, during which she split her time between research, whānau commitments and her full-time job as a Kaiārahi in Student and Scholarly Services.

"My doctoral work has been my hardest and most rewarding," she says.

Her doctoral research explores mahi rangatira and utu: a strategic, ethical and operational system that enables rangatira (leaders) to negotiate, innovate, lead and sustain collective well-being. Her findings see utu (ethical relational exchange) not just as an economic or revenge concept, but as the foundational relational system underpinning Māori leadership and ethical entrepreneurial practice.

"I want Māori and kaupapa-driven entrepreneurs to reclaim and practise the principles of mahi rangatira."

Entrepreneurs can do this through whakaaro rangatira (creating vision), tū rangatira (standing proud) and activating Māori ways of working for themselves, their whānau and collectives, she says.

Abigail's tertiary education journey began in 1990, when she returned from her OE with two goals: learn te reo and tikanga, and go to university. She began by joining a te reo Māori night class at AUT. Later, a small group from that class helped establish the full-immersion Te Wānanga Reo Rūmaki, travelling the country during school holidays and semester breaks.

"Learning te reo, I didn't initially think of it as being political. We were all reclaiming the language together. This conscientisation led me and many of our reo mates to Waipapa Taumata Rau and Māori activism."

> **"It can't just be an intellectual exercise. You have to adopt it and practise it."**
>
> Dr Abigail McClutchie, Faculty of Business and Economics

A hallmark of her career has been seeking proactive ways to support te reo Māori revitalisation, thinking not only about how people could learn the language, but how they could use it in everyday life.

She began working at the University in 2012, initially as manager of He Tuākana, the programme offering mentoring to undergraduate Māori and Pacific students. She's held a range of roles since but always focused on empowering Māori students and staff to realise tino rangatiratanga (self-determination, independence, sovereignty).

In 2024, alongside a dedicated team, she co-founded ReoSpace in Te Tumu Herenga, Library and Learning Services, where staff and students can practise speaking te reo Māori. That year the project won a Vice-Chancellor's award, which Abigail also received in 2022 and 2023, recognising her contribution to other mahi.

In 2025, she received the Indigenous Leader Award Aotearoa through the Council of Australasian University Librarians. She's also the coordinator of MAI ki Waipapa, a professional network supporting Māori and Indigenous doctoral candidates.

Abigail now wants to use her doctoral research findings in meaningful ways, including commercialising the knowledge she's developed.

"I believe it can contribute to Māori and Indigenous communities, particularly in entrepreneurship," she says.

"My biggest takeaway from my studies is that if you're going to talk about mahi rangatira, it can't just be an intellectual exercise. You have to adopt it and practise it. I can say that I've been on that journey of living my best mahi rangatira life."

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/mcclutchie-graduation

Sophie Boladeras and Te Rina Ruka-Triponel

Dame Helen Danesh-Meyer

Following her inner vision

Photo: Chris Loufte

Teams, mentors, patients and persistence have helped Professor Dame Helen Danesh-Meyer reach the pinnacle of her field.

New Zealand's only female professor of ophthalmology, who has ranked among the top 100 ophthalmologists globally, became a dame for her services to eye health in the King's New Year Honours.

Behind that achievement was the influence of her mother, who inspired her career and helped shape her success.

Mahtaban Danesh was among the first women to qualify as a doctor in Iran, says Dame Helen, and provided the steadfast practical support and wise advice that made it possible for her daughter to become a world leader in neuro-ophthalmology.

"My mother was my inspiration. She was a strong, formidable woman," says Dame Helen.

Dame Helen's research, across the University's Department of Ophthalmology and Centre for Brain Research, is focused on neuro-ophthalmology, at the interface between the eye and the brain.

She spends the other half of her working life as a practising ophthalmologist and eye surgeon, specialising in glaucoma and brain tumours, at Greenlane Hospital and the Eye Institute.

It is work that she clearly feels passionate about.

"Going into an eye clinic, I realised sight is the most precious of all the senses and ophthalmologists have the honour of making a big difference in people's lives," she says.

Medicine in the blood

Dame Helen's parents fell in love while both were studying medicine in Iran, but women like Mahtaban faced significant social and institutional restrictions in the country.

"When I was born, my mother didn't want to raise me there, because she wanted me to have different opportunities," she says.

When Dame Helen was two years old, her family moved to the US, where her father, Ali, worked as a psychiatrist focused on addiction in Native American communities. Even though Mahtaban had been a star medical student, she sacrificed her career as an obstetrician and gynaecologist to raise their three children.

When Dame Helen was 15 years old, the family moved to New Zealand. She went to high school in Dunedin, then studied medicine at Otago University.

"When I decided to become a doctor, my mother was my biggest advocate, making sure I had the opportunity to develop my own potential," she says.

Pursuing 'inner vision'

While the sheer complexity of the eye and brain attracted Dame Helen to study neuro-ophthalmology at the University of Auckland, a crisis in her family also sculpted her path.

When she was about 20 years old, her father suffered a brain injury in a serious car accident and was in a coma for three months. She kept hoping his brilliant mind would return, but he became a different person after the crash. He was 49 years old at the time and never recovered enough to return to work.

"I had always been interested in the brain, but that gave me a personal passion and fuel for exploring brain injuries and recovery," she says.

In 1998, Dame Helen was offered two fellowships, in neuro-ophthalmology and glaucoma, at the prestigious Wills Eye Hospital in the US. By this time, she had married periodontist Michael Danesh-Meyer and had recently given birth to the first of their two daughters. Mahtaban's help made it possible for Dame Helen to take up the fellowships that provided a springboard for her career.

In the US, she began using new scanning laser cameras to examine the thickness of the optic nerve, as a method of diagnosing glaucoma.

Dame Helen needed the kind of determination she learned from her mother when she began exploring whether laser images from inside the eye might also be used to diagnose Alzheimer's Disease.

"Some of my colleagues thought it was a far-fetched idea and initially I had grant applications turned down, with comments that the research was 'too blue sky'."

Undeterred, she forged ahead with a groundbreaking study that found clear links between loss of thickness of optic nerve fibres and loss of cognitive ability in patients with Alzheimer's.

Her research, published in *Neurology* in 2006, ended up shifting global paradigms, as it revealed that the eye offers vital insights into the health of the brain. Other researchers went on to use similar techniques of measuring optic nerve thickness to develop a widely used test for diagnosing multiple sclerosis.

"I learned that if your inner vision says something is worth pursuing, it deserves your trust."

> **"I realised sight is the most precious of all the senses and ophthalmologists have the honour of making a big difference in people's lives."**
>
> Professor Helen Danesh-Meyer, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences

'Windows' into the brain

She hopes her research will one day lead to non-invasive scans of the eye being used to help pick up the early stages of brain disorders, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Huntington's diseases.

In an embryo, the eyes develop as an outgrowth of the brain, she explains. The retina and optic nerve are part of the central nervous system, making them perfect 'windows' into the brain.

Dame Helen also needed the courage of her convictions when she pushed ahead with research into the reasons some patients experience severe vision problems, despite no abnormalities showing up on eye scans using optical coherence tomography.

Peers thought this was due to a glitch in the new technology or that patients were exaggerating their symptoms.

She found that in some cases, patients with normal eye scans had brain tumours that were pressing on the optic nerve, causing vision loss. Her team found that if the tumour was removed early, while the optic nerve was still a healthy thickness, the nerve could bounce back and patients' sight could be restored.

In the years following her father's accident, her interest in brain injuries has led to research that she hopes could fundamentally change the way concussion is diagnosed and treated. Using high-speed eye cameras, her team has shown that people with concussion display abnormal eye movements, which change as they recover.

"Eye movement could eventually be used to diagnose concussion and other brain conditions, such as dementia, and to monitor people's responses to treatments."

A passion for helping others

Her father's accident also taught her how it feels to sit in medical waiting rooms with a family member.

"My father's experience has helped shape the doctor I am," she says.

"I know my patients have waited a long time to see me and, for them, their eye is the most important eye."

Her mother's passion for women's rights continues to burn brightly in Dame Helen, who helped found Women in Vision, an organisation that fosters professional and personal growth among female ophthalmologists.

Seeing unmet patient needs drove her to help found Glaucoma New Zealand, a charity that supports people with glaucoma, offering education and advocacy.

She founded and leads the Vision Research Foundation, which supports New Zealand vision researchers working at the forefront of their field, and is also the president of the Neuro-Ophthalmology Society of Australia – the first New Zealander to hold the role.

When she first received an email informing her that she was to be made a dame at an official ceremony later this year, she checked if the missive was spam. Now she is delighted by the honour and hopes it shines light on causes she cares about, although she insists others have been vital to her success.

"My damehood reflects teams, mentors, patients and a fair bit of stubborn persistence," she says.

Rose Davis

Dressing for a milestone

The more than 5,000 people who crossed the stage at Autumn graduation ceremonies wore academic dress that visually represented their achievements and centuries of tradition.

Photos: Simon Young

Among the thousands who flow through the doors of The Graduation Place, there's the occasional graduand who insists they're only getting outfitted in academic regalia and attending graduation to please their parents.

"But then they put on the gown, and they're fussed over with the trencher and the hood," says Nina Tomaszyk, "and you see them grow before your eyes when they realise 'oh, this is important. I've really achieved something.'"

Nina is general manager of the social enterprise, which supplies academic dress for graduation and other ceremonies from Auckland to Northland. While the University of Auckland's Autumn graduation is a busy time for its team, with regalia on high rotation, it's not unusual; from mid-March, The Graduation Place outfits people for several ceremonies a week – everything from lawyers being admitted to the bar to school prizegivings and church events.

So, what's it like working behind the scenes with graduands as they approach such a significant milestone?

"I always love seeing the range of ages, such as when older graduates come in," says team member Brooke Brown. "They may have started studies later in life, but they are so proud. It shows that you can achieve big things at any age."

A highlight for operations manager Lisa Turvey is seeing how graduands reflect their cultures alongside the regalia. She recalls a family who requested a custom-made korowai that had a lining made using the tartan of the graduand's clan, bringing together her Māori and Scottish heritage.

"I saw her at graduation and she looked so proud. That korowai is now in their family, so it will be worn by others when they go through similar milestones."

It's not only graduands that need kitting out for their big day; academic staff members who sit on stage during ceremonies also need to wear their regalia, showing off the scarlet red and gold of University of Auckland PhDs, as well as colours of universities from around the world where they've achieved their qualifications. Among the racks you'll find everything from the crimson doctoral gowns of Harvard to the red robes of Oxford.

The profits it makes from supplying the regalia go to the Kate Edger Foundation, which provides tertiary education awards and scholarships to women across multiple institutions. Each year the foundation has its own awards ceremony to acknowledge the women who receive its funding.

Emeritus Professor Dame Charmian O'Connor was the driving force behind the social enterprise and the non-profit Kate Edger Foundation, with its roots in the Auckland branch of the New Zealand Federation of University Women.

"Traditionally, it was women volunteers who would hire out academic dress and sew the hoods. Over time, as money came in from the hiring, it made sense that funding would support women pursuing education," says Nina.

"It's not just the financial support that it provides, it's also the validation – that someone's backing that they've made the right call to pursue further education."

Caitlin Sykes

What does the regalia symbolise?

Academic dress has been worn for centuries and is full of history and symbolism. The regalia worn by University of Auckland graduates is based on the style of that worn at the University of Cambridge.

The flat-topped hats called trenchers are said to take their name from their likeness to 'trenchers' used in medieval times, which were flat, square plates, usually made of stale bread or wood. The hats are also sometimes called mortarboards, symbolic of a builder's work and of how graduates have 'built' their knowledge over time.

There are a few stories as to why those receiving bachelors degrees have hoods edged with fur (these days, synthetic) while those receiving their masters don't.

One is linked to the order in which scholars sat, with the more learned and senior sitting closer to the fire, and those further away needing the warmth.

Another is that the fur of the hood wore off the longer a scholar wore it, or that the fur was like the feathers of a baby bird, which was shed as a scholar evolved and matured.

Pioneering Surrealist artists on show

Notable artists associated with the Surrealist movement, Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, are on display for the first time in New Zealand in an exhibition at the Gus Fisher Gallery.

Studies for a Keepsake: Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore brings together more than 70 photographic portraits, photomontages and archival material created by Cahun (1894–1954) and Moore (1892–1972), whose creative output is considered to have been decades ahead of its time.

The exhibition is co-curated by Lisa Beauchamp, curator of contemporary art at Gus Fisher Gallery, and Ruth Minh Ha, assistant curator.

The material has been made available by Jersey Heritage Trust, which manages and cares for Cahun and Moore's collection. Following the artists' passing, their collection was purchased by a local man in Jersey, in the Channel Islands, called John Wakeham who then sold it to Jersey Heritage Trust.

Cahun and Moore were lifelong creative and romantic partners, and are now recognised as forerunners of queer and gender nonconforming artistic practice, says Lisa, who first came across them during her own art history studies.

"They're regarded as an early precursor and influence of American artist Cindy Sherman, and their work is taught on art courses globally. Cahun and Moore's images have reached an iconic status and are revered by many worldwide."

Lisa believes it's a testimony to the power of the portraits that they remain enduringly relevant 100 years on.

"They are contemporary in every respect; Cahun's defiant and direct gaze meeting that of the viewer, refusing to be objectified and holding an agency that's omnipresent."

The couple's work spanned photography, writing, collage, performance and sculpture.

Born Lucy Schwob, Cahun adopted a gender-neutral pseudonym inspired by their grandmother, while Moore was born Suzanne Malherbe. The two met as teenagers, later moving to Paris before settling on Jersey, where they continued to collaborate on art and political activism.

"Although their work was never exhibited during their lifetimes, their partnership produced some of the most iconic portraits of the early 20th century," says Ruth.

The exhibition highlights the Surrealist portraits the pair created in the 1920s and 1930s, which feature costumes, masks and staged tableaux, capturing Cahun's exploration of identity and self-presentation.

The exhibition also includes Moore's avant garde photomontages for Cahun's 1930 book *Aveux Non Avenus*, intimate photographs of their life on Jersey, and documentation of their resistance efforts during the five-year Nazi occupation of the Channel Islands.

The two produced anti-Nazi leaflets by listening to illegal BBC broadcasts and translating the news into German. They also disguised themselves to slip these 'paper bullets' into soldiers' pockets and vehicles, signing them as 'The Soldier with No Name' to make the Germans believe a vast underground resistance network existed. They were arrested in 1944 and narrowly escaped execution.

"This exhibition offers a rare, comprehensive view of two artists who risked their lives for their beliefs," says Lisa.

Studies for a Keepsake: Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore runs until 22 August and coincides with the 40th anniversary of the Homosexual Law Reform Act in Aotearoa.

A public programme, supported by the Gerrard and Marti Friedlander Charitable Trust, will accompany the exhibition, featuring talks, performances, film screenings, poetry readings and more.

Julianne Evans

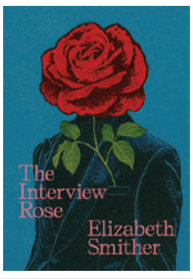
More: gusfishergallery.auckland.ac.nz/upcoming-events

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, *Untitled [Cahun with mirror image]*, 1928. Courtesy of Jersey Heritage Collections.

Te Kaikaukau, The Swimmer

Novelist, memoirist and playwright Witi Ihimaera decided, at age 80, to spend a year immersing himself in te reo Māori full time at Te Wānanga Takiura. This book traverses his experiences through this time 'of sinking and floating; of loss and shame, connection and wairua; of fathers and teachers, kuia and friends'.

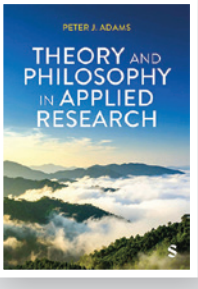
Witi Ihimaera Smiler, Auckland University Press, $45



The Interview Rose

This is the twentieth poetry collection of Elizabeth Smither, who has an honorary doctorate of literature from the University. Each poem in *The Interview Rose* is described as 'a bridge between the private self and the physical world, travelling the long route through art, religion, philosophy and the pleasures of language'.

Elizabeth Smither, Auckland University Press, $25



Theory and Philosophy in Applied Research

Professor Peter Adams (School of Population Health) has written this book for advanced undergraduates, postgraduates and researchers in applied disciplines. It aims to be an engaging and approachable guide, making what theorists are talking about more accessible and demystifying their key ideas.

Peter J. Adams, Sage, paperback $80

Photo: Simon Young

Barkin Sertkaya is the coordinator of the University's Esports Arena, where students meet to socialise and compete in computer games.

Enter the arena

Throughout much of his childhood and teenage years, Barkin Sertkaya was a classical guitar student in the demanding conservatory system in his native Turkey.

It required long hours of music practice, but in the little free time he had, he'd turn to computer gaming, mainly playing first-person shooter games like *Counter-Strike* to connect with friends and blow off steam.

"We were digital natives, so I grew up with screen time. Gaming was a part of household life," he says.

"As a somewhat reserved musician, it was a social thing for me."

Barkin has since become a classical guitar teacher, and his gaming connections have endured and evolved too.

When he's not teaching at the School of Music, where he completed his masters with first class honours in 2023 and is about to start a PhD, you'll find him in the University's Esports Arena.

As the University's esports coordinator, he's the kaitiaki of the arena, located on Level 1 of the Kate Edger building, and has worked in the space since its inception in 2022. It's a busy role and, in contrast to the stereotype of gamers as loners, the arena hums with students.

"They come in, often in groups of three or four, when they've had a busy day or maybe an exam and they want to just blow off some steam, so they'll hop into a game," says Barkin. "Or perhaps they have friends in Portugal or Egypt or America, and this is a way to catch up with them and socialise."

Almost all are playing social games, where groups of gamers band together on a mission, with the first-person shooter game *Valorant* currently the most popular. Socialising and inclusivity are also the focus of weekly events held in the arena, often in conjunction with the University of Auckland Esports Club.

There's also a competitive aspect to what happens in the arena, which hosts interfaculty and inter-residential esports championships as well as events with external organisations, such as the New Zealand Esports Federation and tech companies.

One of Barkin's favourite spaces in the arena is its broadcast setup, from which competitions are streamed on Twitch – an interactive livestreaming service – with hundreds of fans tuning in at times to watch, and listen to expert commentary.

Gaming is a serious business. Globally, esports and interactive entertainment now generate more revenue than film and recording music combined, noted Dr Kenny Ching, a senior lecturer in management and international business at the University, in an opinion piece earlier this year.

Esports "provide a training ground for world-class teamwork and coordination and also digital skills, talent development, and economic growth", he said, meaning they're not only a way for students to relax and socialise but can also contribute to their future employability.

Barkin says he's thrilled he's been able to put his gaming background to use in his role at the arena, and he still unwinds at the end of the working day by jumping into a game at home.

"My son goes to sleep at seven, and from 7.30 I'll spend a couple of hours most days playing *Magic: The Gathering* or a role-playing game. It's still a part of my schedule."

Caitlin Sykes

For more images of the Esports Arena visit: auckland.ac.nz/UniNews