

Uni NEWS

auckland.ac.nz/UniNews

November 2021



THE UNIVERSITY OF
AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

LAMA TONE: PACIFIC LENS ON HOUSING

Architecture is the winner for the former international rugby player

Page 6



SOURCES FOR COURSES

Why and how Marcia Leenen-Young breaks the mould when teaching Pacific history

Page 9



BEHIND THE SCENES

The Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Dame Juliet Gerrard, stars alongside science in a documentary

Page 10



IDEAS FOR LEADERS

Lixin Jiang hopes her research on workplace stress and job insecurity will help pave the way to happier workers

Page 3

Just a few of the University of Auckland staff and student achievements in the media recently. Email: uninews@auckland.ac.nz

GENOMIC DISCRIMINATION

Professor Andrew Shelling (FMHS) talked to NewstalkZB about genetic discrimination, where people's genetic tests are used against them when they seek life or health insurance. Aotearoa's lack of legal protection means that people who are proactive about their health risk being penalised financially and medically. Andrew is part of the group Against Genomic Discrimination Aotearoa (AGENDA).

Link: tinyurl.com/Newstalk-Andrew



Andrew Shelling

BRUCE THE KEA GOES GLOBAL

Amalia Bastos, a PhD candidate in the School of Psychology, caught attention worldwide with the story of Bruce the kea. Bruce lost half his top beak as a baby bird but has learned to use tools in the wild to help himself with his disability. Among the places Amalia's research and Bruce appeared were *Times UK*, *NY Times*, *The Guardian* and the usual local outlets.

Links: tinyurl.com/Stuff-Bruce-Kea and tinyurl.com/Bruce-UK-Guardian



Amalia Bastos, with a different kea!



Susanna Trnka

PANDEMIC HISTORY

Anthropologists Dr Heather Battles and Associate Professor Susanna Trnka were on *1 News* looking at how New Zealand managed previous pandemics, such as polio, and the effects on our social fabric in years to come of shutting borders, effectively excluding some over others.

Link: tinyurl.com/One-News-pandemic



Jin Russell

CHILDREN'S SAFETY PARAMOUNT

Dr Jin Russell (FMHS) talked to the *NZ Herald* about how to keep children safe when they return to school. She called for a "gold standard" for Auckland schools, including providing air filters, as is being done in Victoria.

Link: tinyurl.com/NZH-Jin-Russell



MODERN TOOLS ANALYSE THE PAST

A project that received \$1m in MBIE funding involves archaeologists, bioengineers and

computer scientists from across the University. They will use instrumentation, computational modelling and machine learning to record and analyse collections of Māori cultural artefacts. Professor Poul Nielsen (pictured) from the ABI talked about the project on *Waatea News* and archaeologist Dr Rebecca Phillipps on *Nine to Noon*. The project was also covered in *Stuff*.

Links: tinyurl.com/Poul-Waatea and tinyurl.com/Rebecca-Nine-to-Noon and tinyurl.com/Stuff-artefacts

THIS ISSUE

Profile: Lixin Jiang	3
Good to Know	4, 5
Cover story: Lama Tone	6, 7
Teaching Excellence Awards profiles:	
Richard Easter	8
Marcia Leenen-Young	9
Art & Culture	
Juliet Gerrard: <i>Science in Dark Times</i>	10
Books and winning photo	11
Māramatanga: Barbara Staniforth	12

STAY IN THE LOOP

Your staff email newsletter *Whaimōhio The Loop* comes out every fortnight, with the next edition 10 November.

If you have content or achievements to share, email its editor Ruchita Bharbhari, ruchita.bharbhari@auckland.ac.nz. Details of deadlines are on the staff intranet under News, Events and Notices, *The Loop*.

EDITOR: Denise Montgomery

denise.montgomery@auckland.ac.nz

PHOTOGRAPHY: Elise Manahan, Billy Wong

DESIGN: Stephen Wang

PRODUCTION: The University of Auckland
Volume 51/Issue 9/November 2021

PUBLISHED BY: The University of Auckland
Communications Office

Alfred Nathan House, 24 Princes Street
Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142

Web: auckland.ac.nz/UniNews

Something to share? Email: UniNews@auckland.ac.nz. Copy deadline is the 14th of the month prior to publication.

When posted, UniNews is delivered in certified degradable EPI 'plastic' in keeping with this University's sustainability goals. In PDF, this document has clickable links to any URLs.

AIMING FOR HAPPY WORKERS

Lixin Jiang hopes her research on workplace stress will change people's lives.

Dr Lixin Jiang's fascination with work-related stress in general and job insecurity, in particular, was born out of her own experiences in mainland China of study-related anxiety and burnout.

"I was thinking, if I am this stressed-out as a student, where life is simple, an employee is even more likely to be stressed out."

Her openness about her struggles makes the senior lecturer in Occupational Health Psychology relatable, despite her singular focus on study and academic achievement throughout her life. Plus, Lixin genuinely wants to make people happier.

Lixin confesses to having few interests outside of work, thanks to an upbringing in which she studied day and night with little time to relax. If she does take time off, she enjoys reading about entrepreneurs or, pre-Covid-19, travelling.

Lixin's parents lived through the Great Famine of 1959 to 1961 and hadn't had the opportunity to get higher degrees themselves. They wanted their sole child, under China's one-child policy, to go to university and escape the poverty and factory work they'd had to endure.

"Your parents tell you, if you want to have a good life, you have to push your education. So basically, you have to do nothing but study, study, study," Lixin says.

But in October, China introduced legislation to address that kind of pressure. It passed an education law to ease the 'twin pressures' of homework and out-of-school tutoring, seeking to ban the latter. The law says parents need to adjust children's time to account for rest and exercise, so reducing pressure on them.

For Lixin, the constant focus on schoolwork meant she was burnt out by the time it came to sit the tough exams required to get into a university. She was disappointed with her results and couldn't get into her first choice of university. Nonetheless, she moved to her province Anhui's capital to study social work at Anhui University. She had never previously heard of social work, but it sparked her interest in psychology.

This time, hard work paid off and she passed the exams and entered a masters programme in social psychology at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. From there, she moved to the US and completed a doctorate at Washington State University.



Dr Lixin Jiang's goal is to make workers happier. Photo: Elise Manahan

The combination of her own experience of study stress and her supervisor's expertise took her into the field of organisational psychology with a focus on job insecurity. Plus, it was 2010 and in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis, many companies were laying off staff.

Lixin worked as an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh from 2013 to 2017, but a heavy teaching load meant little time for research. In 2017, a global job hunt led her to a role in the University of Auckland's School of Psychology, Faculty of Science, where she has taught Occupational Health Psychology and continues her research.

She is conducting a literature review on effective interventions to offset workplace stressors and improve employee well-being, which she hopes will have a tangible impact on local workplaces.

"The biggest impact of job insecurity is on well-being. You are not sure what's going to happen. This increases people's anxiety and, if it lasts for a long time, they may develop chronic anxiety or chronic depression. If you're not healthy, you're not going to perform well.

"On the surface, they might have to work harder, but the quality of work tends to decrease. And they might work faster but they don't maintain safety. Creativity suffers because they are preoccupied with the possibility of job loss."

She says organisations should be upfront and transparent, and keep employees in the loop.

"If you're thinking about job insecurity, you don't know what's going on and you're worried. Even if the information from the employer is 'we don't know what we're going to do, we're thinking about it,' it's important. Employers also need to offer opportunities for people to ask questions."

Lixin says leaders play an influential role and employers need to make sure staff's direct managers have good relationship skills. Mutual trust and respect improve employees' ability to cope with stress.

"The biggest impact of job insecurity is on well-being."

- Dr Lixin Jiang, School of Psychology

Another factor that supports employee well-being is a sense of fairness and justice. For example, if someone applies for an internal job and fails, constructive feedback helps with their continued motivation.

Lixin says at an individual level, positive traits such as optimism, resilience, self-belief and hope can help people cope with the stress created by job insecurity. But she believes more workplace interventions are needed.

Currently, there are unique stressors for those working remotely from home in lockdown.

"It's a big change having a virtual team and knowing how to maintain work-life balance for all organisations and employees. Leaders need to check people have the equipment they need and a space where they can work quietly. They also need psychological support. People may feel isolated, but you can provide social support with Zoom.

"Even though we've all had enough of Zoom, technology can help in lockdown," Lixin says, as we end our virtual interview. It is almost 5pm, and she has an online class to teach.

■ Jodi Yeats

TOP TIPS FOR LEADERS

Transparency: Provide plenty of information about plans for changes and offer opportunities for people to ask questions.

Fairness and justice: Explain the reasons for decisions affecting employees.

Interpersonal skills: Leaders may have been promoted for their technical skills but organisations need to train them in relational skills. Trust and respect promote employee well-being.

GOOD TO KNOW

A FORCE IN WOMEN'S EDUCATION

A stalwart of women's education is retiring from leading a successful charitable business that awards scholarships to women totalling more than \$600,000 a year.

Emeritus Professor Dame Charmian O'Connor, 84, has stepped down from the Kate Edger Educational Charitable Trust board, but hopes to stay involved in critical awards decisions.

"The fact my active involvement is coming to an end does not mean that my passion, commitment and interest in the trust and the work it stands for has in any way diminished," she says. "Nearly 70 years of involvement does not come to an end with a date."

In 1950, Dame Charmian's mother, an early female graduate, joined the Auckland branch of the New Zealand Federation of University Women, hand-sewing fur onto academic regalia and baking for charity garden parties. In 1957, when Dame Charmian became one of the earliest New Zealand women to graduate in the physical sciences, she joined the federation. She rose through the ranks until she was president.

She worked in the Department of Chemistry while continuing her research and in 1974, became the first



Dame Charmian at the Kate Edger

Educational Charitable Trust Awards

evening this year.

woman in New Zealand to be awarded a Doctor of Science and, in 1986, became Auckland's first female professor of chemistry.

Dame Charmian is known as a mentor for women in science, including Distinguished Professor Dame Margaret Brimble and Professor Penny Brothers.

As assistant vice-chancellor for Staff Development and Equal Employment Opportunities (1987-1998), Dame Charmian established the Equal Opportunities Office, later the Equity Office. She served as Deputy Vice-Chancellor in 1994. She retired from the University in 2004 and was made a Dame Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2018.

When Dame Charmian established the Kate Edger Educational Charitable Trust, it raised funds by hiring out regalia to students and then lawyers being admitted to the bar. She built up the business, Academic Dress Hire, which earned the trust \$6,000

to \$7,000 a year to give to women to support their university study. Today, with the help of businesses, private individuals and other trusts, it has upwards of \$600,000 to distribute in awards each year.

Support is given based on academic achievement and a proven need, says Professor Linda Bryder, who is a new trustee appointed to take charge of the awards' distribution. For the first time, the trust made an award to a man this year, and Dame Charmian believes the awards will become more inclusive, as well as continuing a longstanding commitment to increasing funding for Māori and Pacific students.

As Dame Charmian hands over the reins of the charity she built from scratch, she has confidence the board will continue her legacy. "I believe the Kate Edger Educational Charitable Trust will continue to be a force for women," she says, just as she has been.

■ Jodi Yeats

WINNING IDEAS

The winners of the Velocity \$100k Challenge, run by the Business School's Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) were announced in October in an online event. Guest speaker was renowned entrepreneur Sir Ian Taylor (Ngāti Kahungunu), founder of Animation Research Ltd.

The Velocity \$100k Challenge is in its 18th year and has led to around 165 ventures and almost 1,000 jobs. From 90 entries in 2021, 15 teams were selected to participate in a professional development programme where they were mentored and helped with their business plan and final pitch to compete for five prizes. Each winner



Alex Risos from RisosEnterprises.

receives a share of the \$100,000 prize, and a spot in the University's six-month VentureLab incubator.

2021 Velocity \$100k Challenge winners

First place, RisosEnterprises: RisosEnterprises is working on a fast, accurate technology to test waterborne e.coli. It is creating the Waicorder® to test water quality anywhere, anytime.

Second place, PrintGig: PrintGig will connect freelancers with consumers who want accessible and affordable 3D printing services.

Social category, Fistbump: Fistbump is a friendship service connecting like-minded people to make genuine friends. It is a purely platonic app that matches based on interests and personality.

Academic category, Supercarbon: Supercarbon's antimicrobial and antiviral technology has multiple applications, including electroceutical wound dressings, face masks and anti-pathogen air filters. Its HealectricCarbon wound dressing uses microcurrents to accelerate healing.

New Ventures category, Delta Waterways: Delta Waterways' product, driven by the latest satellite imaging and machine-learning technology, boosts the frequency, resolution and accessibility of environmental data, including monitoring freshwater and environmental degradation.

■ Read the full story at tinyurl.com/CIE-Velocity-2021

NEW EQUITY APPOINTMENT

The University's new Manager Student Equity has experience supporting people from birth to adulthood.

Carley Fletcher is a trained midwife, but has worked at the University since 2017. She was a student support adviser in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, and was later part of the student engagement team in Campus Life. Most recently she was a health promotion adviser in the Be Well Student Well-being Team. Carley has worked closely with equity groups and been a representative on the Rainbow Staff and Student Network and the Students from Refugee Backgrounds Network. Carley begins the role on 15 November.



Carley Fletcher



Courtney Lynch created the winning research poster.

THE SHOWCASE MUST GO ON

Forensics, gardening and a snapshot of death were showcased online by the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) recently.

Doctoral candidates and masters students took part in the SGS Showcase presenting a variety of research forms: academic posters, images, a 'creative item' and Pecha Kucha. The postgraduate research event had to be moved online but generated wide interest, with more than 6,000 exhibition views from 35 countries.

RESULTS Academic Posters: Pick & Mixtures: Decoding forensic stains with RNA

First prize: Science PhD candidate Courtney Lynch won the Academic Posters category, with her research on decoding forensic stains with RNA.

Runner-up: Trevyn Toone (Science), Conserving Shellfish Reefs.

People's Choice: Samson Nivins' (Liggins) poster was on the association between size at birth and brain volumes at nine years, in children born late pre-term and at term.

Research images: A snapshot of death

First prize: Arts PhD candidate Yan Liu with an image of an archaeological skull with fracture, which she took while working in Xinjiang, China.

Runner-up: Gina Hochstein (Creative Arts and Industries), Gender Impingement.

People's Choice: Mary Spring (Medical and Health Sciences), Foetal Support Network.

Pecha Kucha: Home gardeners' adoption and use of social media for agricultural information searching and sharing

First prize: Business School PhD candidate Prasadi Jayasekara, currently in Sri Lanka, won the new Pecha Kucha category for offshore candidates. Prasadi's research goal is to inform effective information channels for home gardener

sustainability. Prasadi used the showcase to stay connected to the University's research community.

Runner-up and People's Choice: Qun Ma (Education and Social Work), Early childhood teachers' (ECTs) professional identity in China and New Zealand: a case study.

Creative item: Goldilocks Effect: Fine-tuning 'just the right' dose of hormones in the brain

First prize: Shree Kumar is a PhD candidate in Medical and Health Sciences whose creative model demonstrated the hormesis principle. It's the idea that the brain develops by making new neural connections when exposed to 'just the right amount' of stress. Her research focuses on identifying the hormesis zone to treat neurodegenerative diseases, stroke and obesity.

Runner-up: Ella Simkin (Creative Arts and Industries), Postcards of Home.

People's Choice: Han Lee (Science), Haunted House.

■ Read the full story by Emily Gallagher and see all the images at auckland.ac.nz/SGS-winners

BOYD SWINBURN RECOGNISED

Professor Boyd Swinburn is the recipient of the Gluckman Medal for 2022.

The Gluckman Medal is the University's premier medical research award and recognises Boyd's outstanding research contributions to the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences. His research spans more than 30 years and covers the metabolic, clinical and public health aspects of obesity prevention, in which he is an international leader.

Meanwhile Sir Peter Gluckman has become President of the International Science Council (ISC). He will head its governing board for three years.



FMHS students in Rotorua. L-R: Daham Nanayakkara, Rebecca Veitch, Mackenzie Groos, Aakash Rajay, Connie Alarcon and Theresa McLean. Photo: Lakes DHB



The University held a pop-up vaccination event from 16-17 October.

ON THE JAB JOB

Faculty of Medical and Health Science (FMHS) students have been part of the Covid-19 vaccination rollout, even outside of Auckland.

This includes six FMHS students who assisted at the Te Arawa vaccination centre in Rotorua.

Sixth-year medical student Aakash Rajay, who has been working at Rotorua Hospital, was one of those and told the *Bay of Plenty Times* the experience was, "rewarding and exciting".

"We felt like we were a part of something

bigger than us and that feeling was fostered and shared by every member of the team."

Auckland-based staff and students also assisted at the University's City Campus vaccination day at the Sir Owen G Glenn Building in October. The pop-up event ran for two days, coinciding with the national vaxathon. Teams from Property Services, Connect, Campus Life, FMHS and Event Services were involved and made sure the venue was safe and efficient. Tracey McGall, Health, Safety and Well-being Manager, says the event was a success, with 825 people vaccinated. That's on top of more than 1,000 vaccinated at an event on campus over three days in September.



Professor Boyd Swinburn

ARCHITECT LAMA TONE: HOUSING CRISIS REQUIRES A PACIFIC LENS

Back in the day, Lama Tone’s life was all about top-level rugby. But the former Manu Sāmoa player’s focus is now on research and teaching Pacific architecture.

Those fork-in-the-road moments of life can slip by unnoticed and only in retrospect do we identify the moment as one in which the course of life was altered.

Lama Tone’s fork-in-the-road moment was unusually dramatic. It was a few minutes into the Pacific Rim rugby finals in Japan, playing for Manu Sāmoa against Fiji in 2001. He was temporarily paralysed after sustaining a neck injury in a tackle.

That was followed by a night keeping very still back at the hotel while his “limbs felt like they were being carved at with a knife”. Back in New Zealand, the MRI scan revealed a ruptured disc. Again. He’d had a similar injury four years earlier, in 1997, a prolapsed disc “from a cowardly tackle from behind” which meant he had to stay away from rugby for a year.

After the 2001 injury, neurosurgeons told Lama that if there was a third time he probably wouldn’t be so lucky. He retired from rugby, including cancelling another year of contract rugby in France. His globe-trotting life as a rugby player staying in five-star hotels, and the future he’d imagined, was suddenly part of his past. He was 30. He’d planned to continue professional rugby for some years yet.

“My life had just done a massive 180 turn.”

Which was, unsurprisingly, followed by some downward spiralling.

“It was my livelihood. I didn’t know what to do, so I had to dig deep.”

To cut the following two decades short: he enrolled as a mature student at the School of Architecture and Planning (SOAP); went on to do his masters in architecture (honours); set up his own practice New Pacific Architecture; and taught part-time at SOAP as a Professional Teaching Fellow. This year, he joined the staff full-time, as a lecturer.

As has been the only way since August, *UniNews* met Lama on Zoom. He was at home in Māngere Bridge, and appeared in front of the strikingly beautiful background of the interior roof of a fale, designed and built by his friend, architect and alumnus Athol Greentree, for Owairaka-Mt Albert Primary School.

“That’s now a precedent for a project of mine,” says Lama. “For a design and build of a fale at a school in Glen Eden.”

He agrees there probably aren’t many professional rugby players who have gone on to become architects and designers, but it wasn’t that much of a leap. He had trained and worked

as a carpenter while playing club and provincial rugby in New Zealand and was an assistant draftsman for his uncle’s civil engineering firm in Apia when the family had moved back to Sāmoa when he was 21.

And all that travelling as a rugby player, to Europe, Japan, North America and Canada, had exposed him to some of the greatest architecture of the world.

“As a kid, I always enjoyed using my hands to build stuff. I was always interested in building, but that really exploded when I got to travel in Europe. I was just humbled by the structures, spaces, culture and people.

“I never thought I’d pursue a career in architecture as a youngster. I wanted to be a policeman. It only occurred to me after being injured – and having seen the weird and wonderful forms of architecture throughout my rugby and basketball travels. I was good at maths at school and pretty good at art. I think it was my calling.”

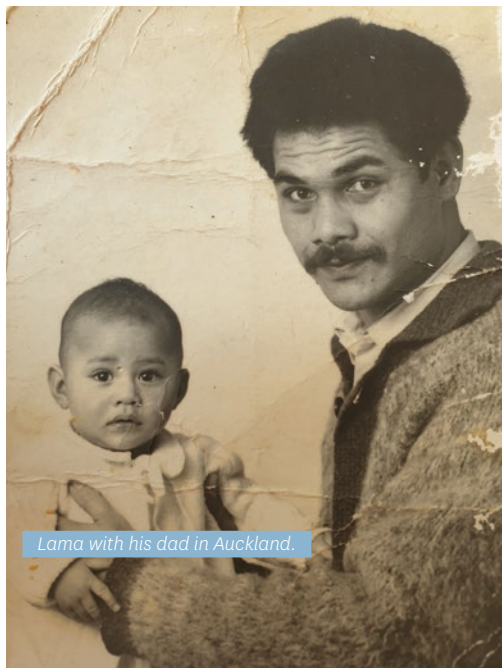
His parents whakapapa to the ancestral

“Pacific people love, and come from, openness, rather than compartmentalisation ... We’re at crisis point not only from a housing stock point of view, but also from a design perspective. We need to get these spaces right.”

– Lama Tone, Lecturer, School of Architecture and Planning



With colleague Dr Karamia Müller and the Dean of CAI, Professor Diane Brand.



Lama with his dad in Auckland.



Aged three, with his mum in Auckland.

homelands of Sāmoa, and he and siblings whakapapa to Māngere and Ōtāhuhu where they grew up and went to school – a younger brother, two younger sisters, and an older half-sister. They all still live in Māngere.

God, family, Sāmoan culture and community are at the forefront of his life, and his family has honoured him with ancestral guardian roles from both parents' sides. "I have three chiefly titles that whakapapa back to Sāmoa – Pesetā (Dad's village of Pu'apu'a in Savai'i) and To'oto'ole'aava (Dad's village of Fasito'o Uta in Upolu), and Fa'amatuāinu (Mum's village of Lufilufi in Upolu)."

The titles are ali'i (high chief) and tulafale (orator).

He also has an architectural practice in Māngere; the local café was his office foyer.

"I never made any money being a solo practitioner, but it was successful in that I was enriched to hear people's storytelling, especially Pacific peoples living in the diaspora."

Over the past three years, Lama has also been working with Kāinga Ora on drawing up a brief called the Pasefika Pilot Housing. He'll be the leading design consultant on the development of a medium-density social housing project, "which will also have universal appeal, but tap into a Pacific perspective here in my hometown of Māngere, South Auckland".

What tempted him back to a full-time academic role? He'd always enjoyed teaching, and the time seemed right – he recently turned 50 – to do more teaching, but also research. He's aiming to start his PhD in 2022. Besides, working as an architect in the real world also means working within the constraints of the client's budget. As a teacher, he can set a hypothetical design brief that allows students to push the boundaries of design – without the constraints of a real-world budget.

"That gives me great creative satisfaction and excitement, guiding them on this part of their journey."

He packs in a lot. He's the chair of the Manu Sāmoa Old Boys Association and its former players are involved in community outreach activities, such as visiting retirement villages, hospitals and private residences to sing carols at Christmas.

"We also try to offer insights to assist young people looking at a professional rugby career, and suggest tertiary and professional career pathways. We provide a mental 'check-in' for current and former Manu Sāmoa players through just kōrero and talanoa and get-togethers."

He has plenty of other interests including fishing off his kayak, camping, golf, boxing, reading, archaeology, karaoke, classic cars, movies and theatre. Oh, and coaching the basketball team of his 11-year-old son Levātumau.

"I started helping the coaching staff for his U13 St Peter's College rugby team. It was Levātumau's



Architecture lecturer Lama Tone wears his Sāmoan heritage with pride. Photo: Billy Wong

"Rugby was my livelihood. I didn't know what to do, so I had to dig deep." – Lama Tone, lecturer and architect

first time playing rugby, but he didn't like it. He loves basketball though, so I ended up coaching his middle school basketball team."

Like father, like son. Lama's first sporting love was also basketball and, at 1.98m, he was cut out for it. He played at high school and for Counties Manukau, and also for Sāmoa in the Oceania Championships which Sāmoa hosted in 1993.

"I got to play with the first-ever Sāmoan/Pacific NBA player.

"But then some village boys came knocking at my door, saying they needed someone to jump in the rugby lineouts and 'grab them some balls'."

One rugby game led to another and he played for Manu Sāmoa from 1996 to 2001. A highlight was beating the Graham Henry-coached Wales side, in Wales' new Millennium Stadium during the 1999 Rugby World Cup. "When the whistle went, you could have heard a pin drop."

And then came architecture, with a focus on Pacific architecture. How would he define Pacific architecture, in a contemporary context?

"I guess it's about designing for a worldview that's different from more Western or modern worldviews and discourses."

That includes designing spaces that break down the walls – literally – and allow for a more open style of living. It is architecture that is sensitive to daily rituals both formal and informal, tapu (sacred) and noa (common), and communal living. It includes designing homes for a more expanded and inter-generational understanding of family.

"Pacific people love and come from openness, rather than compartmentalisation. I think generally living with grandparents is one part of the answer to addressing some of the mental health problems our young people are facing in these modern times.

"We're at crisis point not only from a housing stock point of view, but also from a design perspective and we need to get these spaces right."

■ Margo White

EXCELLENT EASTER

Physics isn't something you study just to get a job, says Richard Easter. It can open up a world of possibilities.

Come December, Professor Richard Easter will have been at the University for a decade, much of it as Head of the Department of Physics, Faculty of Science.

He recently relinquished the role, handing the reins to Associate Professor Jan Eldridge.

"One of the interesting things about academia is if you tell people who are not academics that you've finished your term as head, there's a tendency to think you've done something wrong!"

Far from it. Richard was recently awarded a University of Auckland Teaching Excellence Award for Leadership in Teaching and Learning.

He says he was "chuffed" to win but, like many academics, gives credit to the whole department.

"There have been a lot of changes over the past decade and change can be fraught," he says. "But there has been a growth in research and we've also gone from about 12 PhD students to around 60.

"The HoD role means being a champion for the department and I think that's impossible without a passion for the field, which should flow into a passion for sharing it. Aside from not having the expertise required, I think I would be a lousy biology teacher because that's not my thing."

'His thing' is cosmology. Richard is a theoretical physicist whose research focuses on the early universe, including gravitational waves and the first seconds after the Big Bang that set the scene for the rest of the evolution of the universe. Throw in expertise in string theory, dark matter and black holes, but that's about as detailed as we'll get here.

"I'm interested in gravitational waves, ripples, that are in the fabric of space itself," he says. "That's something that makes sense in the context of relativity, which tells us that space is kind of bendy and stretchy. And there's a possibility that these waves are made in the early universe by processes that happened immediately after the Big Bang. About 15 years ago, I wrote a sequence of papers on ways that these gravitational waves could be produced in the early universe, and we're just getting to the point that the experimental community can think about the technologies needed to detect them."

Richard has a lot of ideas and shares a few of them on Twitter and LinkedIn, proffering his thoughts for the virtual universe.

"Sometimes it's just an itch you have to scratch. I also have a blog which is another opportunity

to share opinion in my field. Astronomy and astrophysics do get a bit of attention."

He has undertaken research with Professor Brian Greene, a noted physicist and mathematician from Columbia University in the US. "Brian is a string theorist and we worked on the connections between string theory and cosmology.

"Brian has several books and TV shows and he and his wife Tracy Day set up the World Science Festival in New York. The interesting thing about astronomy is that children are interested in it, so there are lots of kids' books about it so it's a good entry into science. Collectively, many of us feel the need to take advantage of that opportunity."

Richard has never shaken off his childlike wonder of the universe. He says he was a bit of a loner as a child in Hamilton, and was extremely interested in scientific subjects.

"When I got to university I was in a community of people who were enthusiastic about the things that I was enthusiastic about. It was great."

Following his study at Canterbury, came postdoctoral fellowships at Waseda University in Japan and Brown and Columbia universities in the US. He then taught at Yale for eight years before taking up the role at Auckland in 2011.

His career trajectory was light-years from life in Hamilton where his mother, the late Shirley Maddock, had been New Zealand's first female TV producer and his father was a GP. His sister Elisabeth is a well-known actor, broadcaster and playwright. Richard definitely has an air of the theatric about him, which has served him well not just as a lively lecturer but also in media appearances.

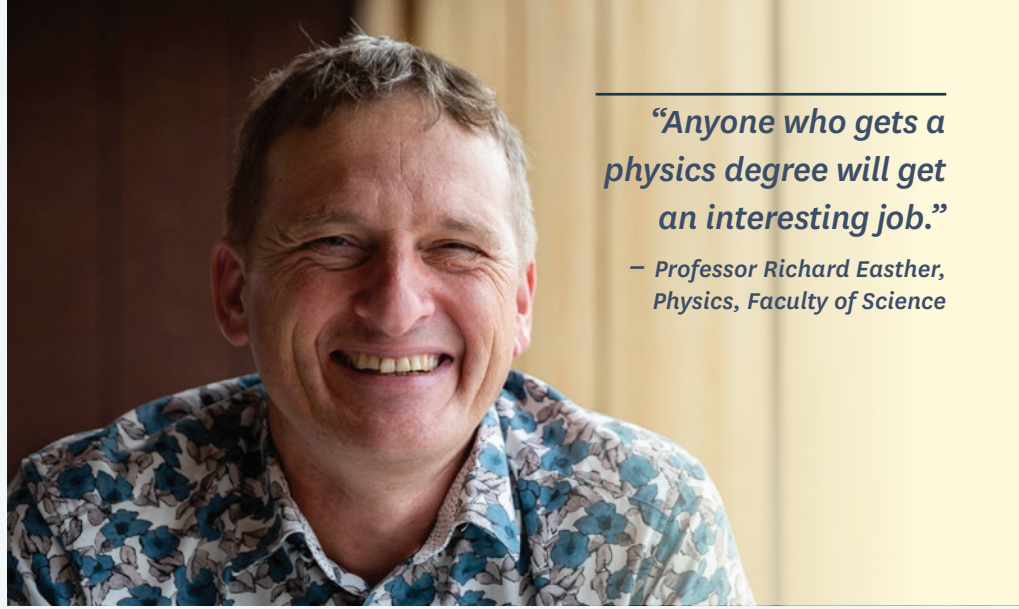
"Mum was happy to see me chase my interests, but she often asked, 'How did I get a child who wants to be a scientist?' However, my background has really helped in knowing what the media wants ... As a scientist it really helps to engage with people."

"Something that bugs me is when students say, 'Oh, I wish I'd done physics, but my parents or teachers thought I should do something else.

"Physics doesn't have a single obvious career at the end of it. Often a child discloses their passion and enthusiasm for space early, and their family

"Anyone who gets a physics degree will get an interesting job."

– Professor Richard Easter, Physics, Faculty of Science



or society talks them out of it. That's something we have to grapple with – are we preparing people for their first job? Or are we looking to give them expertise and understanding in a particular domain from which they build the basis of a future career? The evidence is strong that people who learn something deeply gain a lot just by mastering a particular body of knowledge. That's what we should be valuing. Anyone who gets a physics degree is in line for all sorts of interesting jobs."

He cites his colleague Professor Shaun Hendy as a case in point. "Covid modelling wasn't what Shaun was expecting to do when he did his physics PhD in something not dissimilar to what I do. What always surprises me is when an adult's first response to a child's dream is to ask, 'But how are you going to make money at that?'"

Richard's field of work is internationally collaborative, such as research funded by a 2020 Marsden Grant on understanding the early universe. There's also a Julius von Haast Fellowship, working with researchers at the University of Göttingen in Germany. He and Professor Jens Neimeyer from Göttingen recently created a simulation to look at the evolving structure of the universe in its first trillionths of a second.

But Richard still loves teaching, even by Zoom. In a portfolio submitted as part of the excellence awards, he recognised the changes in the way students have to learn and want to learn.

"Kids are really different these days. Our neurological hardware doesn't change between generations, but students access knowledge today in ways unthinkable a decade ago.

"If our pedagogy replicates our own experience, we cannot serve our students."

That said, he still believes nothing beats a live, in-person teacher experience.

"There's a lot to be said for interacting with someone who knows their subject well. The difference between learning physics from someone like me, or my colleagues, is that it's like learning how to fix a car from someone who has grease under their fingernails; there's a sense that they know what they're talking about. That comes across better when you're in the same room."

■ Denise Montgomery

PACIFIC HISTORY

PACIFIC STYLE

Marcia Leenen-Young is navigating a purposeful course through the Pacific's past.

Dr Marcia Leenen-Young, who teaches Pacific history in the Faculty of Arts, says her approach to teaching can be summed up as “holistic”.

“It’s built from collaboration with my peers, as well as the wealth of knowledge from those who’ve come before us, along with the needs of students.”

Marcia recently won an Early Career Teaching Excellence award from the University, and is known for being “a different type of history teacher”. She prioritises primary sources by Pacific peoples, instead of just looking at what pālagi (non-Pacific people) have written or said, and promotes discussion in her classes. In non-lockdown times, she arranges as many trips as possible outside the lecture theatre.

“For example, about 45 of us had a workshop at the Auckland War Memorial Museum to search for memorials of Pacific soldiers from both world wars. We looked through archives and visited the Hall of Memories, trying to trace Pacific contributions to these wars, but we couldn’t really find any. At the end, students were quite emotional, not having realised how much Pacific peoples had contributed to the country without recognition in our large memorials.”

Marcia’s Introduction to Pacific History is a sweeping survey through time.

“We start with the earliest settlement of the Pacific and usually end in the 1980s. My final lecture was on the Dawn Raids apology and what political apologies mean to Indigenous peoples. I keep a special lecture aside each semester if there’s a current topic I want to talk about.”

When Ihumātao was being occupied, her teaching team presented a collaborative lecture on land seizure and what that’s meant to Indigenous peoples throughout the Pacific. Her second and third-year courses, taught concurrently, focus on New Zealand’s colonial empire in the Pacific from 1900 to now.

“People are often shocked to learn how imperialistic New Zealand was in the Pacific throughout the 20th century,” says Marcia. “But there are key examples illustrating that behaviour. In 1901, for example, New Zealand took control of the Cook Islands and then Niue. We can see clear imperial intent as far back as Governor George Grey, to not only colonise New Zealand but to look beyond to recreate a ‘little Britain’ in the Pacific; to increase its economic stability, control trade

routes and prevent rival imperial powers, such as France and Germany, from increasing their influence.”

Marcia wants to “create a pipeline” of Pacific historians doing postgraduate research, and then researching and teaching Pacific history.

“If you’re teaching Pacific history, it’s important to understand that history for Pacific peoples is connected and intimate.

“One of the biggest influences on my teaching is the late Teresia Teaiwa, an I-Kiribati African-American scholar, poet and activist. She emphasised this connection and pointed out that a lot of Indigenous peoples don’t see distinctions between the past, present and future, but rather see them overlapping. The past is not something that’s finished, it’s still with us every day. Our ancestors are part of who we are, and they walk with us and guide us in the present.”

This connection is part of the reason Pacific peoples often ask where you are from when you meet, she says. “It’s not so much a geographical thing, although there is a vital connection to land, but they’re really asking who are your people, ancestors, connections? Our gafa, our genealogies are part of us.”

Of Samoan and Dutch descent, Marcia always establishes her position at the start of each semester. “I say that as a Pacific person, there are some things I’m going to talk about, like colonisation, that are going to be from that perspective.”

She believes a lot of history is taught as if it’s an object you can analyse from afar, but that’s not her view.

“My perspective is always going to be affected by who I am, my background and my education,” says Marcia, who grew up in Auckland and is an alumna of the University. “I don’t think that’s something that’s taught enough to our students.”

Marcia says her teaching practice is “the end sum” of all the jobs she’s done previously, perfectly combining her own interests, experience and connection to her ancestry.

“I’ve taught a collection of things but my number one love is history. I have a PhD in ancient Roman history, so when I realised I wanted to work with Pacific students, Pacific history was a natural transition.”

She also worked as a Pacific student support adviser in Tuākana Arts and MAPAS (programmes for undergraduate Māori and Pacific students) so when she came back to academia, she found understanding student perspectives was very helpful in her own teaching, especially considering the findings from a research project she did on Pacific students and how they learn at university.

“There were common things students were saying about how being in a Western-framed institution that wasn’t really designed for them affected their ability to learn, how some



Dr Marcia Leenen-Young

Photo: Elise Manahan

“The past is not something that’s finished, it’s still with us every day.” – Dr Marcia Leenen-Young, Pacific History, Faculty of Arts

assessments only promote the skills of rote learning and how much they learn outside the University, such as in church, their families and communities.

“And I thought that was really interesting because there are fundamentals to the way we teach and learn. We provide examples, explain detail and model process and application, so my teaching team and I are always attempting to show the way things should be done.

“With Pacific students, as with all students, it’s also about recognising they have valid contributions to make, and that the specific knowledge they bring as Pacific peoples, such as what they’ve learned from stories being passed down, is important. We value them.”

■ Julianne Evans

OTHER 2021 TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS

Sustained Excellence in Teaching: Dr Emma Willis, Drama, Faculty of Arts

Early Career Excellence in Teaching:
Dr Laura Ann Chubb, School of Counselling, Faculty of Education and Social Work
Megan Clune, School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education and Social Work



The Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor,
Professor Dame Juliet Gerrard. Photo: Elise Manahan

SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

Juliet Gerrard has brought her own style to the role of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, as a new documentary shows.

Professor Dame Juliet Gerrard admits she felt somewhat daunted by her only venture into the Beehive bunker – the National Crisis Management Centre.

It was following the Whakaari disaster in December 2019 and the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor wasn't sure of exactly how she fitted into the work being done there.

"It's a very intense environment," she explains. "Everybody knows their place and role. It was quite daunting initially, but [former director of Civil Defence] Sarah Stuart-Black really made scientists feel at home in there ... she's the type of person who encourages connectivity with the research community and facilitates getting scientific evidence into decisions."

That's also Dame Juliet's role as Chief Science Advisor. The role and science is the focus of a documentary by alumna and filmmaker Shirley Horrocks, who spent three years filming Dame Juliet for *Juliet Gerrard: Science in Dark Times* which screens in Wellington at the NZ International Film Festival.

About that Dame word.

"I try to stick to Juliet," she says. "I don't in any way want to diminish the honour. It's a bit of a tightrope, but I try to keep it casual."

At first, she was reluctant to take the title but did so for science. Particularly for women in science. The Juliet people at the University know has a chat and a laugh with postgraduate students in Old Government House when she can,

resplendent in her cycling gear. "That has been my home turf. I really enjoy the postgraduate environment. It's relaxation from the most stressful parts of the day job, and keeps that connection with the students.

"It's good to share my experiences with postgraduate students, in particular, not just professionally but personally, to unpick some of those misconceptions people have about whether you can have a career and be a mother. There still aren't many senior women in science."

Each week, Juliet works four days in the advisory role and one day at the University, with postgraduates. She squeezes in some research, but her days are beyond full. The government pays her salary to the University for the days she works in the Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor (OPMCSA, pmcsa.ac.nz). She has been in the role since 2018 and was recently reappointed for another three years.

Shirley captures the first three years in *Science in Dark Times*. The documentary uses material Shirley had filmed in a series of science videos for the OPMCSA, in which Juliet features. They cover subjects such as rethinking plastics, fishing, cannabis and, of course, Covid-19. The plastics video includes a conversation between Juliet and renowned primatologist Dame Jane Goodall.

Then came the intensity of Whakaari, terrorism in Christchurch and the pandemic. Juliet says her role is all about connecting with the scientific community.

"I have very high connectivity to a lot of scientists and just call on whomever I need. We also have five people in the Office who are great; all have a science or policy background."

After making all the short films, Juliet says Shirley was very keen to package the footage into one documentary and add some personal material about Juliet.

"That's how it came about. I'd been reluctant because I didn't want it to be all about me. But Shirley reassured me it was about the role and the science. And one of the things I was really

"I love learning new disciplines and understanding how different disciplines communicate."

– Professor Dame Juliet Gerrard

keen on, was recording the work we did and all the expertise that we were drawing on. A lot of the filming was done after big events, and captures reflections from key players," says Juliet. "There was that nice, long, Covid-free window when we could do quite a bit.

"With the second wave, there was lots of different science to include such as genome sequencing. We needed to capture the role geneticists played, and people like Professor Mike Bunce, the Environmental Protection Authority's Chief Scientist.

"The last part of the documentary was the hardest because everyone was in the strictest of bubbles and breaking your bubble to have a filmmaker there just wasn't appropriate."

They got there in the end, including moments with Juliet on holiday on Great Barrier Island.

"Juliet is a natural on camera," says Shirley. "She has an interesting back story and a subtle humour."

Juliet was born in Nottingham in the UK and has a first-class honours degree in chemistry and a DPhil from Oxford. She moved to Christchurch in 1997 to work for the NZ Institute of Crop and Food Research (now Plant and Food) and then taught at Canterbury University. For a while, her academic career carried on alongside raising a son and a daughter, and she started at the University of Auckland as a professor in 2014.

Juliet's specialist research area is protein biochemistry. For different areas of science, she calls on the expertise of others – such as for Whakaari, Covid-19 and the many other scientific challenges facing New Zealand. In doing so, she says she has educated herself.

"One reason I said yes to this role was I love learning new disciplines and understanding how different disciplines communicate. I used to chair the Marsden Council, so I came to understand different frames of thinking and ways of viewing the world and bringing all those voices together."

She admits, with the knowledge she has gained, it might be hard to go back to her quite narrow field of protein biochemistry.

"I have always loved teaching though. I did a teaching session this year in the 'Biological Science in a Post-Truth World' course, talking about the interface of science and society. That was fun.

"I'm looking forward to making more contributions in the science and society area because it's something I've learned a lot about. It's great to expose undergraduates to that side."

In the PM's Chief Science Advisor role, she

is determined to be “rigorous, transparent, accessible and inclusive”.

Her role is independent of the government, as she’s not an employee as such, meaning she is free to speak out on issues if she wishes.

“If you’re a direct government employee, speaking out against government policy becomes very difficult. Whereas this role has a degree of independence so I can, for example, speak to the press whenever I like, I just have to do a ‘no surprises’ declaration, so that the office knows who I’m talking to and what I’m going to say, which is reasonable. It’s important to have that freedom.”

If the government decided to do something that didn’t stack up with the scientific evidence base, Juliet would also be free to discuss that, but so far it has shown it is willing to listen to scientists in many areas, not just Covid.

Juliet doesn’t see herself as part of the 24/7 news cycle and also chooses not to speak on behalf of scientists unless required.

“My primary role is to advise the prime minister on science, not to advise the rest of the country.

“I don’t see my role as to regularly pop up on the news. That was a strategic choice. If you’re close to decisions of government and you’re going to be honest about the advice you give, you can’t release that before a Cabinet decision. You’d become somewhat compromised if you’re advising in confidence and also talking to the media.

“My approach has been to do long-form media, after decisions are made or after reports are released, so I’m still accessible. If you look at the media section on our web page, you’ll see it’s all there. I have deliberately kept behind the scenes and let other people front things.”

She cites, as an example, Professor Ian Lambie (Psychology, Faculty of Science) who has written a series of reports released through the OPMCSA.

“He’s the Chief Science Advisor to the Ministry of Justice. In my predecessor’s days, it would have been Sir Peter Gluckman who fronted those reports. But I was very keen for Ian to front his own report. So I shifted the model. It means there are more faces out there talking to their expertise, rather than me fronting all of them.”

Disappointingly for Shirley, who lives in Auckland, *Science in Dark Times* won’t screen in Auckland after the NZ International Film Festival was cancelled there because of Level 3 restrictions. Instead, it will premiere at the Embassy Theatre in Wellington on 7 November followed by screenings at the City Gallery on 8 and 9 November. Anyone can, however, see the videos that form the basis of the film on the OPMCSA website at pmcsa.ac.nz/topics/.

Shirley says working with Juliet was a rewarding experience. “She’s a remarkable woman. Leading scientists have a lot in common with artists, in their energy and their ability to think creatively. Like artists, they are too little known. They ought to be household names, yet many of them never gain a public profile.”

“I’m pleased to hear her say that,” says Juliet. “People tend to think of artists as creative and scientists as more data-driven and nerdy. But scientists are very creative. You need rigour and all the experimental methods to test your idea. But you need the idea in the first place.”

■ Denise Montgomery

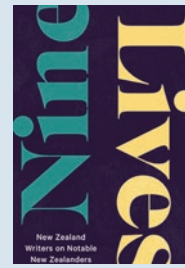
Juliet Gerrard: *Science in Dark Times*
tinyurl.com/NZIFF-juliet-gerrard

STUDENT WINS PHOTOGRAPHY PRIZE

Chloe Alderton, in the final year of a Master of Urban Planning (Professional) and Urban Design, has won the 2021 Simon Devitt Prize for Photography for her image, *The Quarter Acre Dream* (below). Full story: auckland.ac.nz/chloe-alderton-photo



BOOKS

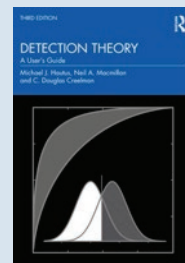


Nine Lives: New Zealand Writers on Notable New Zealanders

In essays on a notable Kiwi of their choice the authors, including staff, show how their life and that of their subject is often intertwined. Writers

include Associate Professor Selina Tusitala Marsh on Albert Wendt, and Associate Professor Paula Morris on Matiu Rata. (Published 11 November.)

Group editors, Upstart Press, \$40

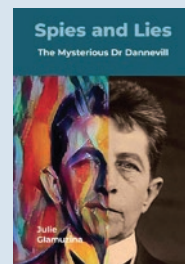


Detection Theory: A User's Guide

Michael Hautus is an associate professor in psychology. He has co-authored this book as an introduction to a tool used in the analysis of data where choices are made

and performance is not perfect. It's a textbook and handbook for practitioners of detection theory.

Michael Hautus, Neil Macmillan, C. Douglas Creelman, Routledge Press, ebook \$108, paperback \$141



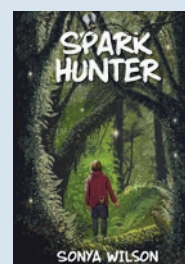
Spies and Lies: The Mysterious Dr Danneville

Masters history alumna Julie Glamuzina explores the life of Hjalmar von Danneville (and variant spellings) who arrived in New Zealand in 1911 and falsely presented herself

as a medical professional. Questions about her gender and relationships with women led to her being accused of being a German spy in 1917 and imprisoned on Somes Island.

Julie Glamuzina, Double Axe Press, \$35

WIN: We have one copy to give away. Email: uninews@auckland.ac.nz by 1 December.



Spark Hunter

Former journalist Sonya Wilson completed the Master of Creative Writing programme in 2017 and *Spark Hunter* is her first novel. It's an adventure-fantasy for readers aged 10-plus, and is set in

Fiordland National Park.

Sonya Wilson, The Cuba Press, \$25

MĀRAMATANGA

“*Kia Manawanui is a revolutionary piece of social policy but unless big things change, it is destined to fail.*”



Dr Barbara Staniforth

Photo: Billy Wong

NEW POLICIES NEED FRESH RESPONSES

In September, the government released *Kia Manawanui, Aotearoa: Long-term Pathway to Mental Well-being*, a revolutionary piece of social policy.

This inspired document finally acknowledges that the causes of mental health and distress are firmly rooted in all aspects of our society, and that while providing adequate resources to support people with high needs within existing services is important, problems with our national mental health will not be fixed until we address poverty, inequality, racism, cultural and social disconnection, and violence against women and children.

While previous mental health policies have centred on addressing mental health needs of the three percent of society most seriously affected by mental illness, *Kia Manawanui* sets out plans for prevention and mental well-being for everyone.

It is a revolutionary piece of social policy but, unless big things change, it is destined to fail.

By now we are all aware that Aotearoa New Zealand has some of the highest rates of youth suicide, violence against women and children, and child poverty. Covid-19 has exacerbated these issues. And racism has certainly been evident in the casting of blame for Covid cases on Māori and Pacific communities. However, Covid may also have given us the opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities as a nation and consider what “being kind” means. Many of these priorities are evident in *Kia Manawanui*.

The pathway is modelled on the government’s *Pae Ora Healthy Futures* which situates people’s well-being within their whānau, communities

and their wider environments and sees these as essential and interrelated. It acknowledges society’s responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and sees the need for widespread intervention through working with communities, iwi, schools and social services while also teaching people about what they can do to build their own resilience. It moves beyond a medical paradigm and recognises the important role that people who have experienced mental distress can play in supporting others and contributing to research and policy for mental health.

There is nothing that I don’t love about *Kia Manawanui*. As a former mental health clinician and as a researcher and teacher in this area, I welcome the framework it provides for change. I think it could make a huge difference and I think most people I work with would also see it this way. But if politics gets in the way, it will all fall down.

Mental health policy has always been a political lightning rod. A Labour government commissioned the second Mason Report (1996, by judge Ken Mason) which was labelled a ‘Journey of Recovery for the New Zealand Mental Health Sector’. It led to increased and ring-fenced funding for mental health and the establishment of the Mental Health Commission. In 2012, the Commission was disestablished by the National government which in 2017 refused calls for an independent inquiry into mental health. Labour responded with *He Ara Oranga, Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction* in 2018. Then, in 2021, the Labour government declared its intent to establish a Māori Health Authority.

While different approaches to policy exist in the arena of mental health, they are nothing compared to other philosophical and economic differences that exist in areas such as wealth distribution and addressing inequality and the impacts of colonisation. What one government introduces, the other is likely to reject.

This alternating approach is not limited to mental health. The Government Joint Venture, a cross-agency organisation made up of ten government departments, has been developing a national strategy to end family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa New Zealand. With ongoing shocking violence and death statistics, the United Nations called on Aotearoa to develop a national strategy in 2018, so it is long overdue. Consultation closed in June and the anticipated national strategy and action plans are due to be released later this year. Similar themes to those expressed in *Kia Manawanui* have emerged, including community engagement, a focus on well-being and the need to address issues of structural power and inequity.

These are not likely to be short-term fixes. The national strategy for ending family violence and sexual violence will likely call for important interventions that may take generations to achieve, just like *Kia Manawanui*. These are not problems that are ‘fixable’ within the political lifecycle. Aotearoa needs to move beyond political partisanship and election cycles if we want to reduce our suicide rates, stop violence against women and children and create a society where everyone can live well and flourish.

Cross-party collaboration, like we’ve seen recently with housing, is key to being able to plan for long-term co-operation and investment that doesn’t change course every time there is a new captain. Responses to Covid-19 and climate change have also given us glimpses of this possibility. Hopefully, we can stay the course.

■ Dr Barbara Staniforth is the Associate Dean Academic for the Faculty of Education and Social Work. She is a registered social worker.

The views in this article reflect personal opinion and are not necessarily those of the University of Auckland.

**White Ribbon Day is 25 November.
See whiteribbon.org.nz**