

Ingenio

**SOUNDS
LIKE US**
The Kiwi
accent's
evolution

**LEADER
INSIGHTS**
What's next
in AI?

**EXCELLENCE
PERSONIFIED**
Meet our
Distinguished
Alumni

SEA CHANGE

Our place in
the Pacific

Big picture





Projecting the future

A holographic 3D printer is captured printing a holographic human sculpture during a function at the University of Auckland's Newmarket Campus.

The project, designed to showcase some of the University's high-tech labs, was produced by the arc/sec Lab, part of the School of Architecture and Planning, which conceptualises and creates environments in the digital world.

Wearing special glasses, viewers of the project could see three-dimensional, free-floating holographic images that brought to life specific objects behind the screen – in this case a model of Professor Olaf Diegel's 3D printing lab in the Faculty of Engineering and Design.

While the projections were visible to viewers in black and white, the bright colours of this image are due to the photographer capturing the project's stereoscopic projections mid-cycle.

Photo: Chris Loufte

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Taumata Rau
**University
of Auckland**

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New Zealand
play in a changing Pacific?



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SUSTAINABLE

The wrap around Ingenio is 100 percent degradable and recyclable. This magazine is also printed on environmentally friendly paper stocks.

Telling our stories



MARK BENTLEY

Director
Alumni Relations
and Development
Waipapa Taumata Rau
University of Auckland

Majoring in English literature at university meant reading a lot of books. And whether it's force of habit or simply an unexamined underlying preference, I still read old-school books (even when the airport scales might favour a Kindle).

If you're a fellow lover of words on paper, you may be reading this in the hard copy of *Ingenio*. Whether you're reading the print or digital version, you may have noticed the magazine looks a little different this issue.

With the University's brand and reader expectations evolving, we felt it was time for an evolution of our own, to ensure *Ingenio* continues to feel fresh, engaging and worthy of the stories it carries. Our refreshed design focuses on improving readability, allowing imagery to tell powerful stories, and creating a consistent visual style that feels both contemporary and recognisably part of the University.

But our deeper purpose remains unchanged: *Ingenio* is about connection.

Ingenio exists because the University genuinely values its more than 250,000 alumni around the world – and this magazine is one of the ways we keep relationships with our alumni alive.

For some readers, it reconnects them with the campus they remember. For others – particularly alumni overseas – it provides a window into the University today. And

for younger alumni, it is a way of discovering the extraordinary network of graduates of which they are now a part.

Across the world, universities are increasingly recognising that strong relationships with alumni lead to stronger communities, richer intellectual exchange and greater philanthropic support for future generations of students. In that sense, *Ingenio* is not just a publication; it is an investment in a lifelong relationship with our graduates and supporters.

Many readers rightly ask whether printed publications still have a place in a digital age. The answer is that a thoughtful balance of print and digital works best for our community.

Print continues to be highly valued, particularly among engaged alumni, and our recent reader survey showed it remains the preferred format for many. It also showed that *Ingenio* remains one of the single-most important ways alumni hear about the University. In fact, it ranked higher than social media, traditional media and most other channels as a source of information about what is happening here.

And we're not alone. These findings are in step with international research, which shows that while magazine readership in general is on the wane, readership of hard-copy alumni publications is strong, including among younger graduates.

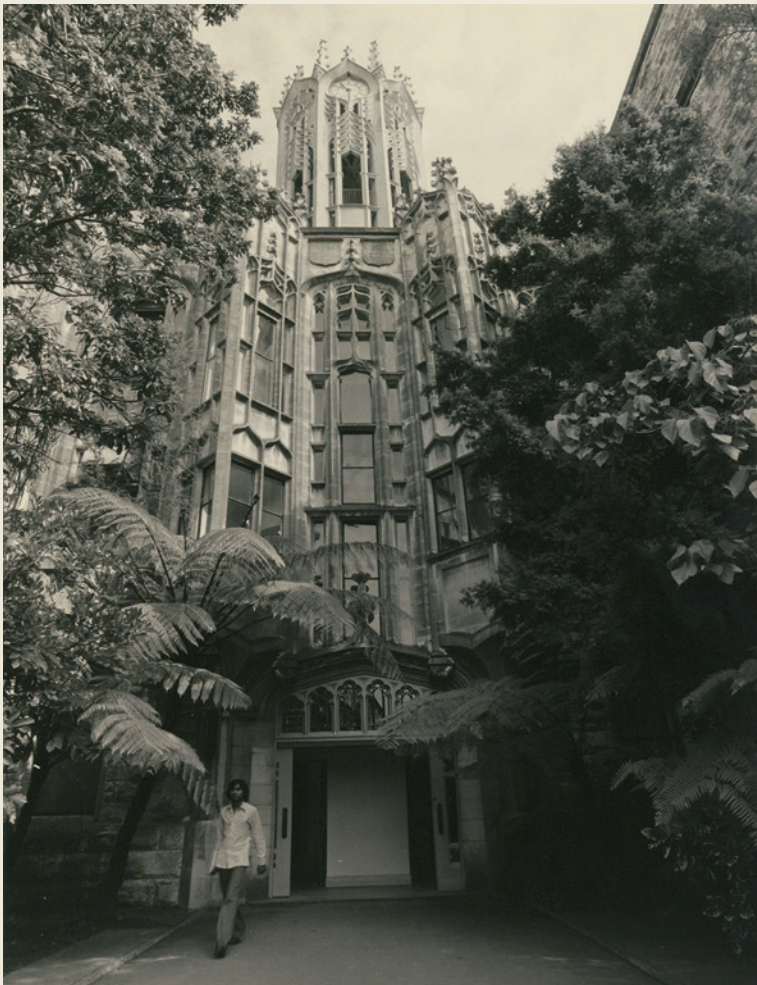
At the same time, however, we are very conscious of environmental sustainability.

Ingenio is printed on 100 percent recycled paper, and the wrapper in which it's posted is fully biodegradable. Alongside the digital edition and website, a printed magazine allows us to reach readers in ways that are both effective and responsible.

We also know from our survey that reading *Ingenio* increases interest in volunteering, attending University events or donating. That doesn't happen because the magazine asks for support directly; it happens because the stories remind alumni why universities matter – and why they themselves remain connected to that mission.

From our deep dive into New Zealand's role in the Pacific and our piece asking alumni AI leaders what the next 12 months holds, to profiles of remarkable alumni, such as Royal Albert Hall organ scholar Zosia Herlihy-O'Brien, we hope you'll find lots to interest you in this issue.

Because, ultimately, *Ingenio* exists to tell these kinds of stories – of a remarkable university, the people connected to it and the impact its work is having on the world around us. If readers finish reading the magazine feeling informed, proud and still part of the University of Auckland community, then it has done its job. ■



ClockTower rings in a century

The iconic building celebrates its 100th birthday this year. By Caitlin Sykes

Standing sentinel for a century, the ClockTower has become a symbol of the University of Auckland, conveying the gravitas and prominence of the institution.

But it's also been the site of some not-so-serious activities – such as the time a car was parked in its foyer or an umbrella planted high up on one of its spires in the heyday of capping stunts.

They're details that the University's Cultural Collections team leader, William Hamill, and archivist Jane Ferguson unearthed while curating an exhibition, *Standing tall: a century of the ClockTower*, highlighting the building's history.

The landmark building was officially opened on 12 March 1926 as the home of arts, architecture, law and music as well the University's library. William says that while curating material for the exhibition – which contains everything from photographs and original building plans to ClockTower 'merch' – he was struck by how central the building has been to student and social life for so many years.

"There was a time when the ground floor was used as a ballroom and would host up to 1,000 people for the graduation ball, which was a highlight of the Auckland social calendar," he says. "Others will



remember it as the backdrop to many Summer Shakespeare productions."

When the University gained funding in the early 1920s to create its first significant purpose-built building, a trans-Tasman competition was launched. The successful design – selected by architects Professor Leslie Wilkinson, Basil Hooper and Walter Cumming – was by architects Roy Lippincott and Edward Billson, and their original plans for the building, including costings (£97,000) are a treasure in the University's archives.

American-born Lippincott moved from Melbourne to Auckland to oversee the build, which raised some eyebrows. Many expected a more traditional, 'English' design, but the winning plan was heavily influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement of the time, embracing elements of the natural world, including native flora and fauna. Where gargoyles might conventionally sit, the design placed kākā and kea, while ponga fronds and kōwhai flowers provide other decorative flourishes on the building's exterior.

The exhibition features images of student life in the building and its conversion into the administrative heart of the University, now housing the offices of the vice-chancellor and other senior leaders.

"The ClockTower has become an icon of the University – its image is on everything from calendars to plates," says William, "but its changing use also tells a story of how the University has grown and changed over the course of a century." ■



***Standing tall: a century of the ClockTower* runs until 24 June in He Māra Mahara Reading Room, Level M of the General Library at the University's City Campus.**



Professor Nic Smith is an alumnus and former dean of engineering.

New vice-chancellor announced

Professor Nic Smith has been appointed the University of Auckland's next vice-chancellor, taking up the role on 3 August.

It's a return to the University for Nic, who was dean of engineering from 2013 to 2020. He is currently vice-chancellor of Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington and has also served as

Provost at Queensland University of Technology (2020-2022), head of Biomedical Engineering at King's College London (2011-2013) and was professor of computational physiology at the University of Oxford (2008-2011).

He takes over from Vice-Chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater, who finished in April. Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation Professor Frank Bloomfield is acting vice-chancellor until Nic starts.

An alumnus of the University of Auckland with a doctorate in engineering, Nic says he is honoured to be returning to lead his alma mater in a city that has shaped both his life and his career.

"The University of Auckland plays a uniquely important role in our national life. It brings together diverse expertise to contribute trusted, evidence-based insights into the complex issues facing Aotearoa New Zealand.

"At a time when public debate can feel increasingly short-term and polarised, universities matter profoundly as a place of careful analysis, long-term perspective and respectful disagreement. This contribution to our shared future has never been more important." ■



FULL STORY:

auckland.ac.nz/vc-announced-smith

Students experiencing food insecurity

Almost half of university students are experiencing food insecurity, with those living away from the family home and struggling financially at greatest risk, according to new research.

The study, led by University of Auckland researchers, is the first to quantify food insecurity among university students in New Zealand. It found that 45 percent of surveyed students were food insecure – meaning they lacked reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious and appropriate food.

"The study is timely, because we are seeing in the media that students are having a tough time with the cost-of-living crisis," says lead researcher Dr Berit Follong, a research fellow in population health in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences.

The findings from the University of Auckland



student population are in line with similar recent studies in the US and Australia.

"Many students are juggling high living costs, limited income and study demands. For some, food is where they make compromises," says Berit. ■

Dr Berit Follong says three-quarters of those who reported eating well were living at home.



FULL STORY:

auckland.ac.nz/food-insecurity



Gift supports environmental research

A multi-million dollar gift will ensure nature-based, solutions-focused environmental research will continue to thrive at the University of Auckland.

The George Mason Centre for the Natural Environment received a \$10 million philanthropic gift from the George Mason Charitable Trust in April.

The gift builds on the late Dr George Mason's \$5 million donation in 2016, which enabled the establishment of the centre to strengthen research in the natural environment and biological sciences.

Over the past decade, the centre has supported research addressing pressing environmental challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, microplastics, environmental restoration and conservation. It has funded 34 seed projects and supported six masters students, 18 postdoctoral fellowships and 19 PhD students.

Centre director Professor Simon Thrush says Dr George Mason's philanthropy has allowed for vital research at a time of growing environmental urgency.

"The long-term generosity of the George Mason Charitable Trust has enabled researchers across the University to collaborate across disciplines, respond quickly to new challenges, and focus on the issues that matter most for the future." ■

Above: Trust chair Barry Upson, Chancellor Cecilia Tarrant and Kaiarataki Michael Steedman at an event recognising the gift.
PHOTO: FPSPHOTONZ

 **FULL STORY:**
auckland.ac.nz/george-mason-gift



New Ngā
Ahurei Fellow,
Professor
Yvonne
Underhill-Sem.

Royal Society fellows named

Five University of Auckland academics are among the 21 new Ngā Ahurei Fellows recently elected to the Academy of the Royal Society Te Apārangi.

Recognising researchers, scholars and innovators throughout New Zealand, the fellows have achieved excellence in their various disciplines across science, technology and the humanities.

Professor Yvonne Underhill-Sem, a Pacific studies and geography scholar of Cook Islands, Niuean and Pākehā descent, has been elected for her intellectual leadership on gendered social relations and development studies in the Pacific.

Professor Craig Elliffe, from the Faculty of Law, has been recognised for his global leadership in international taxation law, with his most recent works addressing public and government concern about the light tax burden on companies operating in the digital economy.

Three further fellows have been named from the Faculty of Engineering and Design.

A leader in wireless power transfer and advanced power electronics, Professor Aiguo Patrick Hu has been recognised for leading tech advancements enabling power delivery without electrical contacts.

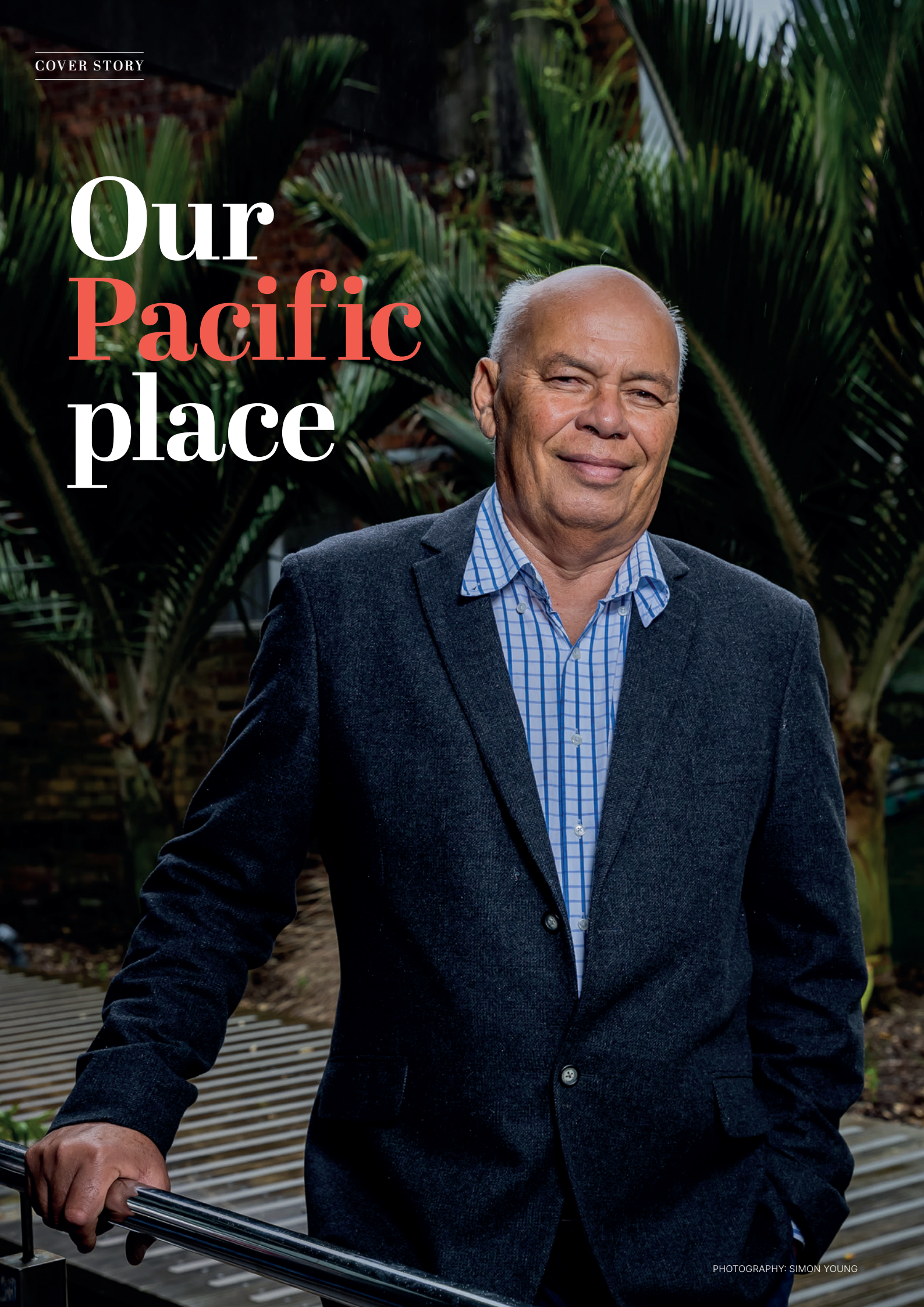
Professor Andy Philpott has been elected for leading research in the field of optimisation in electricity markets and other industries. The engineer's research has been used as a basis to decarbonise and cheapen electricity in several countries.

And elected for pioneering research and utilisation of bi-directional wireless power flow, Professor Udaya Madawala has fundamentally advanced this field by enabling two-way wireless energy flow, allowing devices to seamlessly exchange electrical energy without physical connections. ■

 **FULL STORY:**
auckland.ac.nz/nga-ahurei-fellows-2026

COVER STORY

Our Pacific place



PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON YOUNG



New Zealand's identity and relationships have been firmly anchored in the Pacific through a shared heritage and history. But with many Pacific countries facing urgent health and climate-change challenges, and powerful states exerting shifting influences in the region, Owen Poland asks what role can and should we be playing in the Pacific today.

Pacific nations need to step up and speak out on their pressing issues, says Associate Dean Pacific, Sir Collin Tukuitonga.

New Zealand's connections in the Pacific run deep, from the country's discovery by the great explorer Kupe to the later arrivals of migrants in waka, and the present diaspora of some 440,000 Pacific people who call New Zealand home.

The All Blacks, for one, wouldn't be as successful "if we didn't have Pacific Islanders in the team", says University of Auckland Associate Dean Pacific, Sir Collin Tukuitonga, KNZM.

And broadly, New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours have "a long-term, respectful, mutually beneficial relationship straddling across political and economic development – a whole range of things", he says.

Current geopolitical tensions, however, have challenged some traditional relationships and raised concerns about China's growing influence; New Zealand's strained relationship with the Cook Islands following the latter's signing of a strategic partnership last year with China, is one example.

As journalist and alumna Sarah Bradley noted in a column for *Ingenio* last year, China has become the second-largest aid donor and investor in the Pacific region, behind only Australia, and is poised to challenge traditional donors for influence.

However, Sir Collin says China has been in the Pacific "forever".

What the People's Republic supports by way of development "is money New Zealand saves and Australia saves that they can use elsewhere", he says, whereas he describes the influence of the US as "reactive, self-centred and loud – and they make lots of promises that are never delivered".

As co-director of Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa, the University's Centre for Pacific and Global Health, Sir Collin oversees a range of initiatives – from a mental health and well-being study in six Pacific countries to improving cancer care and diagnosis, and offering doctoral student scholarship support.

He is also chair of the recently established Pacific Academy of Sciences, which unites scientists, policymakers and Indigenous knowledge holders in a shared mission to strengthen Pacific scientific leadership.

"The Pacific needs to step up and speak out on these issues, whether it's conservation, ocean science, climate change, child development, crime, and the impact of heat on health."

While the biggest issue facing the Pacific is understanding the "true impact" of climate change, he says "the Polynesian curse of diabetes and heart disease and obesity just seems to roll on, despite our efforts. So, it's a huge agenda and we're doing what we can."

Pacific leadership

Professor Guy Fiti Sinclair, from the Faculty of Law, says New Zealand has long seen itself as part of the Pacific family.

"In some ways New Zealand's interests or policies have aligned with Pacific Island policies on a number of issues, like the Nuclear Free Pacific. However, on others – most importantly on climate change – their approaches have diverged."

In an opinion piece published last year, Guy flagged the increasing risk of Pacific countries being used as political footballs, as tensions and competition between powerful states such as the US and China reach new heights in the region.

In such a climate, he noted that "New Zealand could, and should, have a role in intervening and protecting our Pacific neighbours".

“It can’t be a leadership by bullying or by pushing, because that’s not part of the culture that’s been established among Pacific countries.”

– PROFESSOR GUY FITI
SINCLAIR, AUCKLAND
LAW SCHOOL



Through its membership of the Pacific Islands Forum, he says New Zealand has a strong opportunity to work with Pacific Island states in navigating their way through increasing geopolitical tensions.

“It can’t be a leadership by bullying or by pushing, because that’s not part of the culture that’s been established among Pacific countries. To be effective, it has to be a more consultative, consensus-based kind of leadership.”

Last year, Guy became the first Pacific person appointed a professor at Auckland Law School. Currently, he is just over halfway through a five-year study, funded by an \$800,000 Rutherford Discovery Fellowship from the Royal Society Te Apārangi, that analyses how international legal frameworks intersect in the Pacific on key issues like security, trade and climate change.

“These are all areas which are normally seen as distinct regimes in international law, but in the Pacific, they all kind of mesh together. My interest is in unpacking that.”

Given the success of Pacific countries in pushing for international treaties like the Paris Agreement on climate change, and their influence on forcing an expansion of legal protections for oceans at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, he says there’s much to learn from the examples set by New Zealand’s Pacific neighbours.

“Their achievements are remarkable. And so, the

question is, what can we learn from that and how can we support those kinds of efforts going forward?”

Associate Professor Gordon Nanau echoes this idea. Having recently co-authored a book called *Oceanic Diplomacy*, which examines the modern-day use of traditional diplomatic practices between tribes and islands, he says greater understanding of these practices could help resolve current geopolitical tensions.

“The way leaders engage with each other and the type of relationship that they have determines the type of responses that they get,” says Gordon.

In his role as deputy head of the School of Māori Studies and Pacific Studies, Gordon says that while New Zealand is very familiar with the Polynesian part of the Pacific, more attention needs to be paid to all sub-regions of the Pacific in university curricula and research.

“There’s more engagement or more work that can be done with the Micronesian part of the Pacific and the Melanesian part of the Pacific.”

From a research perspective, he’s involved in multiple studies, including a critical look at the perception that Pacific Island communities are mostly helpless when it comes to issues like climate change.

“Over centuries, Pacific communities have been resilient and they’ve proven time and time again that they do deal with change that came to them externally or from the environment.”

You can’t talk about us, without us

For Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific, Fonoia Professor Jemaima Tiatia-Siau, New Zealand’s relationship with the Pacific is characterised by a mutual respect and shared understanding that has deep ancestral ties between First Nations people.

It’s an understanding embodied in the University’s inaugural Pacific strategy, which was launched in 2025. Jemaima says the strategy, called *Ala o le Moana*, or ‘pathways of the ocean’, aims to elevate Pacific-led

Left Professor Guy Fiti Sinclair says New Zealand could learn from Pacific leaders' remarkable achievements.

Below Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific Professor Jemaima Tiatia-Siau says research projects should build Pacific capacity and capability.

research through meaningful and authentic engagement.

"We should be encouraging Pacific-led research and Indigenous knowledge systems. It's about building this workforce or pipeline to be able to have traditional knowledge systems and Western scientific frameworks that coexist."

It's also about shifting attitudes and enabling Pacific researchers to lead their own projects – and ultimately grow workforce capacity and capability, she says.

In step with Sir Collin's assessment that understanding the impact of climate change is the region's biggest issue, Jemaima's current research explores the impact of climate change on mental health and well-being in Niue, the Cook Islands and New Zealand. The project, funded by the Health Research Council, also looks at how well prepared the mental health sector is to manage climate-induced migration.

"You can't talk about us without us. And so, for me, it was hugely important that my team was Pacific led, that we built capacity, that there were researchers on the ground in those sites that provided some career opportunities for them."

Li'amanaia Dr Roannie Ng Shiu knows better than most about the challenges of being on the front line of research to understand the impact of climate change on the well-being of Pacific people.

"We just don't have the capacity to be dealing with these issues

on our own, and we need to be collaborating more with international partners in filling these quite critical data gaps so that we can adapt faster to a changing climate."

Roannie, who alongside Sir Collin and others, is a co-director of Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa, is currently based at the National University of Sāmoa, where she is an adjunct associate professor. She is also executive director of the Pacific Academy of Sciences and part of the global Lancet Countdown, which tracks up to 60 indicators on health and climate change.

In collaboration with the University of Sydney, she's conducting research to better understand the impact of rising heat in Sāmoan schools.

"We know that days are getting hotter. What we don't know is how this is impacting the learning outcomes for children in the Pacific, so

numeracy and literacy are really important in terms of better outcomes."

A key objective is to gather baseline information on a range of issues, and Roannie is also consulting with Professor Russell Foster, a British expert in circadian neuroscience, to investigate how better sleep can improve mental health outcomes for young Pacific people. "We know it's definitely a problem, but there's a solution already out there that's non-pharmacological and what we need is some funding to help us scale this project out."

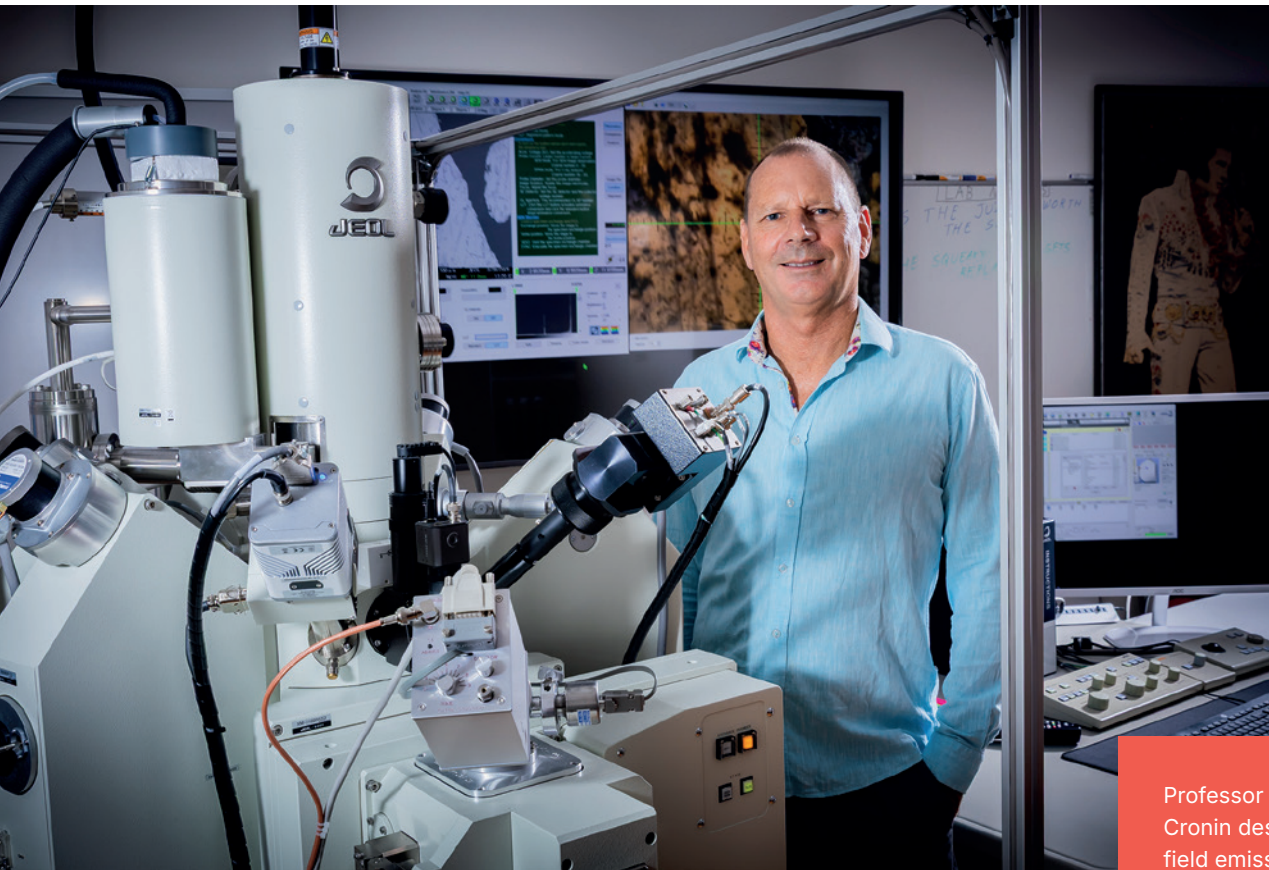
Building workforce capacity is core to the mission. The challenge is to upskill health workers without luring them out of the islands to more lucrative roles in New Zealand and Australia.

"If we can help Pacific people to take the time to get qualified, but then fill the gap with people from the University of Auckland, that's a win-win situation."

PhD candidate Dr Sainimere Boladuadua from the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences is among a group of female researchers and health practitioners advocating for more inclusive, externally funded research that builds local capacity – and gives credit for it.

"We're grateful for the funding, we're grateful that it's addressing our health issues, but we'd also like to gain some of these qualifications or the credit that's due there."





Professor Shane Cronin describes the field emission electron probe microanalyser (microprobe for short) “like a scanning electron microscope on steroids”. Able to detect the chemical composition of a solid sample, the instrument is used extensively in his group’s research, particularly for ‘fingerprinting’ volcanic ash layers within archaeological sites. “We can identify which volcano they came from and also fingerprint single eruptions with well-constrained ages. In this way, we can help our archaeologist colleagues identify when and how people have been affected by volcanic and related tsunami events in the past several thousand years.”

In a recently published paper titled *Re-imagining global health: Perspectives from the next generation in the Pacific region*, Sainimere and her colleagues propose increasing Pacific people’s sovereignty, connectivity, and equity and participation in health systems, as well as integrating world views, including those of Indigenous communities.

The Fiji Oxygen Programme is a case in point. In partnership with Fiji’s Ministry of Health and Cure Kids, the University of Auckland is making medical oxygen more accessible and cost effective in health facilities – and training members of the clinical and biomedical workforce in its use.

“Our partners first listen to what our health service needs and priorities are, then they come alongside and work with us. And from this partnership, there’s capacity building for the health workers as well.”

For her thesis, Sainimere is investigating how to improve access to care for Fijian children suffering from acute respiratory infections, like pneumonia, which are the leading cause of morbidity and mortality for Pacific children under age five.

In addition to examining multiple-year data sets to assess the true extent of the burden, she’s also diving into the experiences of patients by interviewing families, health practitioners and policymakers about their journeys in a very Western model of healthcare.

“I would like to see that the way we deliver healthcare is more fit for the population that we serve.”

A shared geography

Alongside climate change and health challenges, understanding and mitigating the impacts of natural disasters is a major focus in the Pacific.

The Faculty of Science’s Professor Shane Cronin was the first overseas volcanologist to be allowed into Tonga after the January 2022 eruption of Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai, a volcanic island 65km north of Tongatapu, Tonga’s main island (see *Ingenio*, Autumn 2022).

He’s now leading a five-year MBIE-funded study worth \$7 million, which has a major aim of increasing the resilience of infrastructure following that powerful volcanic and tsunami event.

“Just between New Zealand and Tonga there’s something like

150 volcanoes that we don't know much about," says Shane, "so we're trying to figure out which of those are the most dangerous and learn how to prepare for those dangers."

Saving lives with early-warning systems for tsunamis, and protecting vital communication links, such as undersea cables, is a priority. The study, he says, could result in a combined cable-satellite system rather than more vulnerable undersea cables.

"If countries get knocked off the internet, the banking system, supply-chain systems, all these different things really go down and that's a big deal. The delay in repairing these things is quite long and the costs are astronomical."

Shane's research is also looking at the way people in Tonga quickly escaped to higher ground in 2022 without any official warning.

"It's the most gracious evacuation I've ever seen, so we're interested in that aspect. It's obviously knowledge put into practice in a way that saves a lot of lives."

To establish long-term research partnerships, the University of Auckland is pairing its PhD students with those at the University of the South Pacific, as well as hosting visiting fellows from the Pacific.

In keeping with the idea of being a good neighbour, it's about building positive, reciprocal relationships.

"We're bringing in trusted background scientific knowledge and new techniques and capabilities that can be adopted in-country so that we can provide specialist support and a general increase of the local capability," says Shane. ■

Cool roofs

Using reflective roof paint to reduce indoor air temperatures and improve health and well-being is one option under investigation by Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa, the University's Centre for Pacific and Global Health.

Known as the REFLECT or 'Cool roofs' project, it aims to provide a passive adaptation technology that's being trialled on hundreds of homes in Burkina Faso, India, Mexico, Niue and Fiji where researchers are monitoring health, environmental and economic outcomes.

"I saw this project as an opportunity to work on something that's tangible, practical and potentially quite a simple and effective way to help protect the most vulnerable communities around the world," says project manager and PhD candidate Dr Noah Bunkley.

Noah's involvement was driven by his interest in global health equity, and he believes that Pacific countries are often overlooked by global health programmes.

"Working in the Pacific makes sense because they're our neighbours. And I think we as New Zealanders have a responsibility to support those communities as much as possible."

Primarily funded by the UK's Wellcome Trust, and with Sir Collin Tukuitonga as the principal investigator, REFLECT is also supported locally by Habitat for Humanity and the Tindall Foundation, which are taking a keen interest in the outcomes.

"The main idea is to generate results that can have some real-world impact, and maybe generate more funding so that other communities can receive a cool roof." ■

A legal victory

Dr Justin Sobion describes the delivery of an advisory opinion by the world's highest court last July as a 21st-century nuclear moment.

In collaboration with Vanuatu and the Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change, the Caribbean-born environmental law expert was at the forefront of a successful international legal battle in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to clarify the legal obligation of states.

Acting as Counsel for States in his home region, Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Justin helped achieve the landmark 2025 ruling, which held that states have a legal obligation to limit their

contributions to climate change and that they may be held accountable to compensate vulnerable nations for any harm caused.

"The ICJ advisory opinion on climate change is the 21st-century nuclear moment, and it's driven by youth, driven by civil society, and it's up to us to keep that momentum going, keep states on their toes."

The Auckland Law School lecturer points to the unequal impacts of the loss of maritime territory and borders as sea levels rise: "The Earth is 29 percent land and 71 percent water, most of which is in the Pacific region. So the challenge for them is more acute than other parts of the globe."

One solution, he says, is Australia's 'climate visas' for those in Tuvalu,

which each year allow 280 citizens of the low-lying Pacific nation to relocate to Australia, and he'd like to see more collaboration on others.

"How can the bigger Pacific neighbours partner to help the smaller nations who are underwater? And it's not only Tuvalu; it's Kiribati and the Marshall Islands."

However, because the ICJ ruling is non-binding, and is being resisted by some states that don't view climate change as a priority, Vanuatu is leading the charge, with other small-island Pacific states, to adopt a resolution at the UN General Assembly to achieve formal compliance of the court's opinion.

"What's at stake now is international morality," says Justin. ■

Crafting wood while the world burns

As the editor of *The Spinoff* for four years, I spent most days solving problems, and I was very good at it. They were brain problems, not physical problems, and execution was the easy part (usually involving deleting a paragraph, changing the tense, making a phone call or typing an email). It was hard work, no doubt about it, but it was also all in my head. And working in a 'clever' industry means learning a lot of shortcuts.

Didn't get the juicy detail you thought you would? Change the angle and pretend it was never the goal. Can't say something for legal reasons? Delicately select your words and structure to make a point without defaming anyone. Angry reader? A well-crafted email almost always placates them.

There's no shortcut or workaround or clever wording to get me out of this one. And I've never been happier.

within that, but my brain has had a lovely rest, including from the 24/7 news cycle that consumes every editor.

Except now I have a problem that I can't solve.

Two years ago, I took up woodworking as a hobby because I needed something physical to do that would get me offline. It's the best decision I ever made and I've spent hours in the workshop making picture frames or fixing old stools or designing furniture.

At the end of last year, right around when I was leaving my job, I bumped into a friend who mentioned in passing that they were looking to buy a selu – a traditional Sāmoan comb with

intricate designs, made from a single, thin piece of wood. I immediately dived into the research and found surprisingly little on selu and how they were traditionally crafted. At the time I found no handmade hardwood selu for sale, so I figured I'd make one myself.

And that's when I came across the simple problem that has utterly stumped me: how to cut a basic shape into thin wood.

Such a simple concept and yet, months later, I'm still figuring it out. I can cut the outer edges easily enough with a saw and chisels. And even the teeth are surprisingly easy to shape with a scroll saw. But those internal cuts have proven impossible, and despite repeated search queries online, I've found no solutions. Turns out not many people have needed to cut a triangle into the middle of a thin piece of hardwood.

Just the other day I spent four hours in the workshop trying out more methods. I tried drilling tiny holes into each corner and chiselling out the rest – the wood split with the force of the chisel. I tried drilling bigger holes and filing them into triangles – the wood splintered on the back from the pressure of the drill bit. I tried using a Dremel, which nearly worked but had a brutalist effect where fine cuts are needed.

This thin piece of wood continues to haunt me. If I don't figure this out, I simply can't make a selu. There's no shortcut or workaround or clever wording



MADELEINE CHAPMAN

is a former editor of *The Spinoff* and was a senior editor at *North & South*. Her author credits include the autobiography of basketball player Steven Adams (co-written) and a biography of Jacinda Ardern. Alongside woodworking, the Arts alumna is now learning to book bind.

to get me out of this one. And I've never been happier.

I think I know how it *could* be done – a very tedious and slow process using a scroll saw, which I will attempt next – but the fact that I still cannot figure out how Sāmoans in the late 1800s crafted these combs is thrilling. I've found no modern practitioners of traditional selu (although there are some made using a laser cutter, which is a different kind of clever) and no record of tools or materials used back then.

They figured it out, though, and if it takes me the rest of this year to solve my one simple problem, it'll be a year well spent. ■

This article reflects the opinion of the author and not necessarily that of Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland.

Professor Simon Mitchell diving the wreck of the *Nagato*, Bikini Atoll.

Diving deep

“I don’t think I’m a particularly brave person,” notes Professor Simon Mitchell – however, those who have watched the documentary *Deeper*, currently screening on Netflix, may beg to differ.

The documentary charts a 2023 expedition in which Simon and his band of diving mates, known as ‘the Wetmules’, attempted a world-first dive using hydrogen as a breathing gas at New Zealand’s Pearse Resurgence.

The Pearse is an icy spring at the base of a valley two hours’ walk, or a shortish helicopter ride, into Kahurangi National Park. The room-sized pool conceals a complex network of caves, which plunge far beneath the forested mountains and are occasionally visited by extreme cave divers.

In *Deeper*, we see the divers enter the underwater cave system and follow the line into Nightmare Crescent, then drop 100 metres before following a shaft further down, passing through chambers with names like Stanton’s Hole and Well of Our Souls.

It is terrifying to watch on screen, but Simon, who heads the University of Auckland’s anaesthesiology department, says he’s confident in his extensive dive training and experience: “It doesn’t feel like a brave thing to jump in the water and go really deep. It just feels like something I do.”

In the aftermath of the expedition, Simon’s research team (including University research fellows Drs Hanna van Waart and Xavier Vrijdag) has gained close to \$1 million of funding to test the addition of hydrogen to the diver’s gas mix for ultra-deep diving. Hydrogen is slightly narcotic, so Simon will conduct further work on whether it could calm a neurological tremor that can affect divers when they exceed depths of around 180 metres.

The self-appointed ‘guinea pig’ for the Pearse hydrogen dive was fellow anaesthetist Dr Richard ‘Harry’ Harris, hero of the Thai cave rescue of 12 schoolboys and their coach. Harry had reason to trust Simon if things went wrong: Simon is listed on Expertscape, a global directory of scientists,

A passion that began growing up on Wellington’s south coast has led Professor Simon Mitchell to win an ‘Oscar’ of the diving world. By Jodi Yeats

as the number-one expert worldwide in decompression sickness, or ‘the bends’.

“Simon is one of the most experienced technical divers there is, and has a planet-sized brain,” says Harry in *Deeper*.

This year, Simon’s dive-medicine research has been acknowledged with a prestigious award from the Academy of Underwater Arts and Sciences, the NOGI Award 2026 for Science. Previous winners have included Jacques Cousteau; Bob Ballard, who discovered the wreck of the *Titanic*; and director James Cameron.

Simon’s technical diving firsts include doing the then deepest-ever shipwreck dive, to the wreck of the *AHS Centaur*, 175 metres deep off the coast near Brisbane, in 2002. In 2015, Simon was also named Rolex Diver of the Year.

Another leading-edge experiment has taken Simon and Harry to the Caribbean this year.

The pair took blood samples from four elite breath-hold divers (including alumnus and 40 Under 40 awardee William Trubridge) at the bottom of an 80-metre dive and then again at the surface before the divers took a breath. It is hoped the data from this experiment, funded by a US philanthropist, will help prevent a deadly syndrome where breath-hold divers, even snorkellers, pass out when they reach the surface.

Simon’s first degree, from Central Institute of Technology, was in marine biology, and he worked as a science technician before heading to med school at the University of Auckland, aged 26. After a stint in the Navy, he trained in anaesthesia – a speciality he says is compatible with his diving-related work.

Simon now spends three days a week in the operating room and two days a week at the University, on teaching and research, most of the latter diving related. The total dedication has all been worth it, he says.

“The amazing places I’ve been, the people I’ve been with, the sights that I’ve seen underwater, I would consider it collectively, a massive highlight of my life.

“This whole world that right from being a little kid has fascinated me – I just enjoy it.” ■



Penguins at Kelly Tarlton's Sealife Aquarium showed a preference for white plastic bottle caps.
PHOTO: ARIEL-MICAH HESWALL

Penguins prefer white plastic

A new study shows penguins, which are known to eat plastic bottle caps, select white plastic, even when it's not more plentiful than other colours.

University of Auckland research fellow Dr Ariel-Micaiah Heswall tested plastic colour preferences of king and gentoo penguins at Kelly Tarlton's Sealife Aquarium in Auckland.

She found the 46 gentoo and 23 king penguins interacted far more often with white plastic than other colours, possibly because white reminds them of prey, eggshell or their own feathers.

Red, blue, black and white caps were used in the experiment, and the seabirds chose white almost twice as often as black, and about 45 percent more often than red or blue.

White plastic could be a "sensory trap" for penguins, because it might lure them with a colour that appeals to their senses, but has harmful consequences when they eat it, says Ariel-Micaiah, from the University's Faculty of Science and the Centre for Climate, Biodiversity and Society, Ngā Ara Whetū.

Putting a lid on the production of white and clear plastics could reduce the threat for many seabird species, she says. ■

 **FULL STORY:**
auckland.ac.nz/penguins-plastic-preference



Participants didn't talk a great deal about the long-term risks of drinking, such as heart disease or cancer, says Dr Kate Kersey.
PHOTO: WILLIAM CHEA

Weighing drinking's health impacts

Women manage the immediate health impacts of alcohol, but pay less attention to long-term risks, such as cancer, according to new research out of the University of Auckland.

Dr Kate Kersey, a research fellow in the Centre for Addiction Research, interviewed 50 New Zealand women aged 35 to 60, both individually and in friendship groups, to explore how they understand and manage their drinking.

Overall, 29 women (58 percent) drank at least twice a week, and 25 women (50 percent) typically drank three or more drinks on each occasion.

"There was a strong sense of expert knowledge in how participants talked about what alcohol does to the body," says Kate. "They spoke frequently about its negative effects on sleep quality, energy levels and weight.

"Interestingly, they did not talk much about long-term health effects, such as heart disease or cancer. However, consistent with our other research, some participants said that if they were to develop cancer, they would feel deeply guilty, worrying that alcohol might have contributed." ■

 **FULL STORY:**
auckland.ac.nz/women-drinking-impacts

Humans and animals like same mating calls

Charles Darwin had a hunch that birds had “nearly the same taste for the beautiful” as humans. New research points towards humans and other animals indeed sharing aesthetic preferences.

In an experiment, people choosing a favourite from two mating calls of an animal species tended to match the preferences of the species itself.

In other words, when a female frog prefers a certain croak from her suitor, humans may agree that it sounds better.

“This result seems wild and it is,” says Dr Sam Mehr, of the University of Auckland and Yale University, the senior author of the study. “The big-picture implication is of some universals across species in the appreciation of sound.”

The lead researcher, Dr Logan James of McGill University in Canada, the University of Texas and



the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, says one explanation may be that humans share many aspects of perception with other animals.

“The results are very exciting,” says Logan.

“Across nature, the smells of flowers, the colours of butterflies and the songs of birds didn’t evolve for humans, yet we find them beautiful. And it seems there are shared preferences we are only just learning about.” ■

Zebra finches’ calls featured in the experiment.
PHOTO: SARAH WOOLLEY



LISTEN TO THE MATING CALLS IN THE FULL STORY: auckland.ac.nz/common-sound-tastes

Harakeke shows promise tackling ‘forever chemicals’

One of Aotearoa New Zealand’s taonga plants, harakeke, shows potential as a treatment for removing ‘forever chemicals’ from drinking water.

Known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), forever chemicals are one of the greatest environmental challenges. Linked to cancer and reduced fertility, PFAS are in the blood of humans and animals around the world.

In lab experiments at the University of Auckland, chemically treated harakeke outperformed other water treatment methods that were tested.

“Our research findings suggest there is a potential for developing a cost-effective PFAS treatment approach based on this native plant,” says Dr Lokesh Padhye, who is an honorary academic in the Faculty of Engineering and Design and the associate director



of emerging contaminants research at the New York State Center for Clean Water Technology.

“There is more work to be done, but the sustainability and availability of the material make it particularly promising,” says Lokesh. ■

Dr Lokesh Padhye sees potential for cost-effective water treatment using harakeke.



FULL STORY: auckland.ac.nz/harakeke-pfas

Growing in harmony

Violinist, organist and conductor Zosia Herlihy-O'Brien has found her calling bringing classical music to a wide range of audiences, including at London's famed Royal Albert Hall. By Rebekah White



As the violinist stepped onto the stage of the Auckland Town Hall for the dress rehearsal, the string section of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra behind her began the soft hazy trembling that opens Sibelius's violin concerto.

Zosia Herlihy-O'Brien, then 15, was watching, transfixed. While she'd watched dress rehearsals before, this one was different. "It was demystified," she says. "It wasn't this concert persona coming to the stage." And it wasn't just the casual 'hoodie and track pants' attire of the violinist, Dutch star Janine Jansen, which broke down the walls for the young Zosia; it was the process.

As Janine lowered her bow, she stepped forward to consult with the conductor. Then they played the section again, then again. "They'd stop and change the most subtle things," says Zosia. "You could see the machinations of how things were fitting together."

A violinist herself, Zosia knew the concerto well. But now she could see how all the parts worked; how the different voices of the orchestra emerged and retreated. "I think I just got a glimpse into that world and thought, 'I can do that too.'"

Zosia grew up in Glendowie, in east Auckland. Raised by parents with omnivorous music tastes, she can't remember a time she wasn't attuned to rhythm and pitch. When Zosia was a baby, her mum noticed

her nodding her head in time to music; at three, Zosia pointed to a violinist on television and said, "I want to do that".

What sets Zosia apart from other musical prodigies is that she's never stopped adding other instruments and disciplines. While another student might have focused singularly on the violin, Zosia has since taken up the piano, harp, organ and conducting. Today, she directs choral groups, symphony orchestras and chamber ensembles. The best part is collaborating with others, she says, shaping the 'journey' of a concert, taking it beyond simply performance.

Most recently, though, Zosia's attention has been on the organ. In December, she was named the inaugural organ scholar at London's Royal Albert Hall, and she's partway through her year studying under organist and classical-music celebrity Anna Lapwood.

Recently, Anna has become an unexpected social-media star: she posts videos on TikTok and Instagram of her performances on the world's largest musical instruments.

"She reaches so many people," says Zosia. "A lot of what she does, I really want to do. I want to communicate the organ and music to people who would not otherwise go and seek it out. And to be a woman, and a young woman, at the forefront of this is so important."

Zosia Herlihy-O'Brien pictured in London's Royal Albert Hall, where she is the inaugural organ scholar.

Women remain vastly underrepresented as conductors and music directors – not to mention as organists. Zosia is also the resident organist at London’s Charterhouse; she’s only the second woman to hold the position in 700 years. (The last one was in 1884.)

The organ is not for the faint-hearted. The Royal Albert Hall’s instrument, nicknamed the ‘Voice of Jupiter’, has four keyboards, a pedalboard for the feet, 9,999 pipes and 147 stops, which allow the player to change the sound. As a result, the organ can imitate most of the instruments in the orchestra.

Zosia hadn’t played the organ before winning the spot of organ scholar at her Auckland high school, Baradene College of the Sacred Heart. From then on, she spent her lunchtimes in the chapel practising. Towards the end of her secondary education,

a careers counsellor made a foolish attempt to redirect her into medicine or law. Zosia remembers slamming her hands down, saying, “I’m doing music” and leaving the meeting. It was a relief to reach the the School of Music at the University of Auckland, she says, where she took a characteristically wide selection of classes.

She particularly loved a graduate-level paper on experimental music led by composer Associate Professor David Chisholm. Think setting pianos on fire, or ‘preparing’ them by tipping screws and bolts into the strings, changing the way they sound.

“I wouldn’t have thought to go seek this out, and I remember thinking, ‘Wow, there’s so much I can explore and discover,’” she says. “That was probably the most formative class at the University of Auckland that I took.”

Zosia was also itching to try conducting, and she began studying the discipline under acclaimed choral conductor alumna Karen Grylls.

“She is one of the most inspiring wāhine in the creative field that I’ve had the pleasure of learning from. She just has so much music in her.”

Immersing herself in choral music and leading a choir were other new experiences.

“What I learned with her was that the whole choral world really translated into how you

approach the string section of the symphony orchestra – and then, in turn, the other instruments.”

It led to a role as music director at St Mark’s in Remuera, arranging music for services – a position Zosia held until she left Auckland to pursue her Master of Music at the Royal Academy of Music in London. When she arrived in the UK, she immediately started a new chamber choir and then a string ensemble – the Woolf Quartet (named after their rehearsal quarters, which used to be one of Virginia Woolf’s London residences).

Ever since Janine Jansen walked onto that stage in trackpants, Zosia has been pondering authenticity, and how that relates to soloists’ stage persona. With the Woolf Quartet, she’s exploring how to make things less formal, less staged.

“That’s something we’re really trying to break down,” she says. “As a performer, you walk out on stage and there is that wall between performer and audience – that’s just the traditional, conventional concert setting.”

Inspired by radical violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Zosia began performing barefoot. In a recent improvisation session, she decided to find out if she could lie down on the floor while continuing to play. (Yes, but everyone thought it was weird.)

As well as touring the UK and Europe, the Woolf Quartet does community and outreach work, exploring how to make music more interactive. Their most recent audience? Very young children – the same age Zosia was when she first saw a violin.

“The whole point of that is that it’s not performer and audience; it’s all creating things together,” she says. “The kids will do something and we’ll react to it; we’ll go over to them and talk to them and play off what they give us. It’s so unpredictable, but it’s so much fun.” ■



“I think I just got a glimpse into that world and thought, ‘I can do that too’.”

The AI outlook

Artificial intelligence is developing at such breakneck speed it's hard to know when and how the technology will next materially impact our lives and work. Anthony Doesburg asks four alumni working globally on the front lines of tech about where they see AI taking us in the next 12 months.

AI is said – by AI itself in response to a web query – to have hit the mainstream in 2022 with the launch of ChatGPT by US

company OpenAI. Since then, AI chatter has gone from a background hum to full noise. At the time of writing, the news of the day was how GPs are saving up to ten minutes per patient consultation by using AI-powered ‘scribes’ to generate clinical notes.

Also creating buzz was Environment Southland’s approval of plans for an ‘AI factory’ at Makarewa, near Invercargill, by Singaporean-owned company Datagrid. As news broke that the US\$3 billion data centre had been green-lit, University of Auckland computer science senior lecturer Dr Ulrich Speidel told the Science Media Centre the thousands of graphics processing units (GPUs) housed in such facilities have two types of output.

“[There’s] data – which is what we want – and heat, which is generated when the billions of logic gates in the GPUs do their switching.” Makarewa has a cooling advantage thanks to its average air temperature of nine to ten degrees. Yet Datagrid’s facility, intended to come online by 2028, is still expected to be the country’s second-biggest electricity user.

That same year, worldwide investment in data-centre construction will reach US\$3 trillion according to the *Economist*. In the magazine’s rosier view, we could be entering “a new world of economic growth” of 20 percent a year in which artificial general intelligence (AGI) models are better than the average person at most cognitive tasks.

Then there’s the less-rosy view. Free software activist Richard Stallman, a veteran of Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s AI Lab, recently said “pretend intelligence” is a more apt name for AI and that ChatGPT is a “bullshit generator”.

Then there was that open letter in 2023 signed by tech titans including Elon Musk calling for a pause in training AI systems after OpenAI’s launch of GPT-4, which cited the risks such powerful systems pose to humanity. (One of OpenAI’s original backers, Elon Musk has since mooted creating data centres in space to provide AI processing power. To help get there, he has merged his rocket company SpaceX with his AI company, which espouses ‘AI’s knowledge should be all encompassing and as far reaching as possible’, suggesting his GPT-4 qualms have passed.)

Closer to home, the AI Forum first brought together New Zealand’s AI developers and users with researchers nearly a decade ago. And last July a national AI strategy was launched with then-minister of science, innovation and technology Shane Reti saying the country needed to develop stronger

capabilities to “drive economic growth” but the government would be “taking a light-touch approach”.

Yet surveys of public attitudes to AI show widespread anxiety.

A 2025 study by Melbourne Business School and KPMG spanning 47 countries and more than 48,000 respondents found while two-thirds of people regularly use AI for personal, work or study purposes, less than half trust AI systems. In New Zealand, 76 percent of those surveyed were concerned about negative outcomes from AI and less than a quarter thought existing safeguards were sufficient. But two-thirds expect AI to deliver a range of benefits.

Superpowered sceptics

University of Auckland alumni in the thick of AI development can see the technology’s upsides yet recognise the public’s nervousness.

Hamish Macalister, for one, acknowledges concerns over job security as AI eliminates many roles.

“The pace of change is way beyond any form of technological development we have seen before. That means it is too fast for typical human adaption, such as retraining and reskilling,” says Hamish, who is a co-founder of Singapore-based Transparently.AI. And with that, he notes, comes the accompanying risk of more extreme disparities in wealth distribution.

However, in the financial risk assessment field, where Transparently.AI operates, the benefits of the technology are clear, says Hamish, who completed undergraduate and masters degrees in accounting and economics at the University of Auckland in the 1990s followed by a doctorate in finance in the late 2000s. After three decades in the quantitative finance world, he started Transparently.AI with cloud computing specialist Mauro Sauco, formerly of Google, IBM and Amazon Web Services.

Transparently.AI has built a ‘digital forensic detective’, which looks for clues that companies are cooking the books.

“We use AI to solve a trillion-dollar problem: the fact that traditional auditing only catches about three percent of accounting fraud,” says Hamish, who is the company’s chief scientist. “We have a success rate of over 90 percent for prediction of corporate collapses up to three years before they happen.”

Coming down the AI pipeline he sees a new era of agentic AI, defined as autonomous agents capable of multi-step reasoning and execution.

“In finance this means an agent won’t just flag a suspicious transaction; it will initiate the investigation, cross-reference it with historical data across different platforms and draft the regulatory filing – all while you sleep. We are moving from ‘AI as a tool’ to ‘AI as a digital co-worker,’” says Hamish.



“We are moving from ‘AI as a tool’ to ‘AI as a digital co-worker’.”

– HAMISH MACALISTER, CO-FOUNDER, TRANSPARENTLY.AI

Above Hamish Macalister says we’ll need to develop a healthy sense of scepticism as AI erodes our sense of trust in some information.

If things play out well, he sees the technology helping solve humanity’s myriad challenges, but that doesn’t mean he’s immune to the nervousness being expressed more generally about such trends.

“My co-founder and I talk about this all the time. We both have kids. We are deeply concerned regarding how this plays out and what it means for them.”

One response in the face of AI’s erosion of trust: promoting the notion of scepticism as a superpower. “People everywhere will have to develop a forensic mindset similar to what we use at Transparently.AI,” he says.



Left Natasha Crampton says developing AI responsibly involves the intersection of technology, law and society.

Putting up the guardrails

Natasha Crampton, a University of Auckland law honours and information systems graduate, has arguably one of the most influential oversight roles within the AI development world. The former Microsoft Australia and New Zealand in-house counsel is chief responsible AI officer at the software giant, a key partner of OpenAI.

Based in Redmond, Washington, she leads Microsoft's "effort to translate the company's AI principles into practice". Her team works with engineers, researchers and the company's commercial divisions on guardrails that govern how AI systems are designed and reviewed.

"It's work that sits at the intersection of technology, law and society – an interdisciplinary space I was drawn to long before AI dominated the conversation," says Natasha, who understands people questioning AI's costs and benefits.

"It's also true that many earlier technological innovations – like electricity or the internet – have led to societal shifts and upheaval. It's important to be clear-eyed about both

"It's important ... to make choices that guide the technology towards outcomes that serve people and society."

– NATASHA CRAMPTON, CHIEF RESPONSIBLE AI OFFICER, MICROSOFT

the risks and the potential of a transformative technology like AI and to make choices that guide the technology towards outcomes that serve people and society."

Natasha, who was a member of the UN's High-level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence, highlights international efforts being made to mitigate the risks of advanced AI systems. A UK government-commissioned *International AI Safety Report* released this year – its reviewers included AI Forum New Zealand – sets out to help policymakers keep up with the technology's developments. Unsurprisingly it notes "the rate of change, the breadth of applications and the emergence of new risks pose important questions".

Microsoft attempts to answer some of those through the AI Economy Institute, which it set up last year to sponsor interdisciplinary study of the technology's economic and social impacts.

Natasha says the institute's establishment is in line with the report's recommendation that a network of such bodies be created.

"The international network of these institutes was featured at the India AI Impact Summit in February and is already creating the foundations of an international science of AI evaluation," says Natasha.

A 24/7 junior colleague

While AI poses global challenges and opportunities, it's already helping most of us with the day-to-day.

For Amar Virk, San Francisco-based product lead at Irish-American payments company Stripe and a University of Auckland electrical engineering graduate, his personal AI lightbulb moment occurred during a 2024 home renovation project.

"I'm not an expert in home construction and didn't always know whether my contractors were doing things right," says Amar. "So I'd take photos of the work and upload them to ChatGPT to double-check things or ask questions to verify what my guys were telling me."

As the project progressed, he increasingly relied on ChatGPT, becoming convinced the technology was a step change, not just hype.

Adoption at work was slower. "These things tend to move more cautiously in a corporate setting. But I started bringing AI into my own workflows at Stripe pretty quickly."

Initially, he used it for drafting emails and producing documents, expanding it to help with such tasks as keeping meeting notes, tracking action items and even creating custom dashboards and doing analysis.

He believes the "computer use capabilities" of Claude, the AI from Anthropic, represent a breakthrough, where AI doesn't just answer your questions but does things on your behalf.

"Within the next 12 months it's clear we're going to have



what essentially amounts to a capable junior colleague that works 24/7.”

Another leap he sees is multimodality: instead of responding just to text inputs, AI will work seamlessly with text, images, video and audio. If both trends advance at the rate he expects, he is forecasting the emergence of extraordinary downstream applications in the coming year.

“In science, for example, you can imagine an AI agent that doesn’t just answer a question about a protein, it autonomously designs an experiment, runs simulations, analyses the results, adjusts its hypothesis and starts again. Around the clock, no breaks.”

He urges the AI-hesitant to try it out on planning a trip or deciphering a complex document.

“The fear tends to dissipate once you see that these are powerful but imperfect tools – they’re impressive and useful, but not magic or infallible.

“The people building these systems are, by and large, thinking seriously about safety and alignment. That doesn’t mean mistakes won’t happen – they will – but the narrative that AI development is reckless and uncontrolled doesn’t match what I see from the inside.”

Advances in film and music

Education is the context in which University of Auckland conjoint business and arts graduate Bethanie Drake-Maples is applying artificial intelligence at Atypical AI, which she founded in 2023 in San Francisco.

She has more than a passing acquaintance with the field. Bethanie spent five years at Google AI, has a masters degree in learning science from

Stanford University and is completing a PhD there.

At a fraction of the cost of human tutoring, Atypical’s AI-based tutors provide help for exam preparation that used to be too expensive for all but the richest test-takers.

“We take a unique approach, combining socio-emotional learning, psychology, human-computer interaction and cognitive extension theories to craft an experience that supports neurodivergent learners at any stage of test preparation,” says Bethanie.

She talks to people daily who are concerned about AI’s potential impacts on students, teachers and people who are neurodivergent. “It certainly is a time of unprecedented change and rapid [AI capability] releases without a huge amount of user testing.”

However, she’s encouraged that technically sophisticated research centres such as Stanford’s Graduate School of Education and MIT are on the case.

Acknowledging that international competition in AI at the economic and military level is “a cauldron”

in which some sets of users will be disadvantaged, she says “many millions if not billions” of people are benefiting from the technology daily.

While AI will result in job losses in some sectors, such as computer coding, for example, it will also democratise some areas, distributing creative potential to a wider group of people. If some creatives see that as a threat, Bethanie is excited by developments in AI-generated music and film.

“We’re seeing great advances in AI film editing that I think will unlock wonderful creativity. And, of course, advances in music just seem to be an incredibly joyful application for artificial intelligence globally.”

She dreams of bringing a learning science venture home to New Zealand that meshes with this country’s cultural values, seeing “an opportunity to make education and intelligence a national strategic asset”.

“But a learning science venture in New Zealand can’t just be a ‘copy-paste’ of Silicon Valley tech; it has to be built for our unique context,” says Bethanie. ■

Above Amar Virk of Stripe urges the AI-hesitant to give the technology a go.

Right Bethanie Drake-Maples dreams of bringing an AI venture home. PHOTO: CHRIS LOUFTE





Think big

‘Live overseas’ and ‘build big things’ were at the top of a list of goals Calven Bland wrote while at university. As the engineer tells James Fyfe, both have been firmly ticked.

Growing up, Calven Bland had little interest in the classroom and was convinced his future lay in the army. Today, he is a Singapore-based engineer who has worked on some of Asia’s most ambitious marine construction projects.

“I struggled at school,” recalls Calven. “I was an outdoors guy; I liked playing sports and hated exams, hated learning.”

For years, becoming a soldier felt like the obvious path. But in his late teens, after narrowly missing out on officer selection, things began to shift. Encouraged by his parents to pursue a professional qualification, he started looking in a different direction. Although he had joined the New Zealand Army Territorial Force while studying at Carrington Polytechnic (now Unitec), he went on to enrol in engineering at the University of Auckland.

“There was never an intention to go to university, but once I got there, I actually quite enjoyed it,” he says. “It opened up a whole lot of things, both from a learning perspective and in terms of social connection. It developed my inquisitive nature and also made me a little more analytical.”

Alongside his studies, he continued serving in the Territorials as an aerial dispatcher and movement operator – a role that took him to Antarctica during several of his summer breaks, a place he would “go back to in a heartbeat”.

Calven, who is proudly half Fijian, also connected with his Pacific heritage at the University, as a founding member and future president of the South Pacific Indigenous Engineering Students group (SPIES).

“I was always aware of the cultural aspect surrounding me, and I kind of embraced it,” he says.

There weren’t many Pacific people in engineering when he was a student, he says, “so I gravitated towards that community, and I think it might have centred me a little more”.

That sense of connection extended beyond culture into leadership. Alongside his involvement in SPIES, Calven served as president of the Auckland University Engineering Society. Looking back, he says this early experience of working closely with others, along with his time in the military, helped shape his future leadership style.

“It made me more tolerant and understand it’s not just ‘the world according to Calven’. It also prepared me for the teamwork side of engineering.”

Even then, his ambitions were already stretching well beyond New Zealand. During his studies, he wrote down a list of goals – a list he still has to this day – and at the very top were ‘live overseas’ and ‘build big things’.

Both would soon become reality.

After graduating in 1999 with a Bachelor of Engineering, majoring in civil engineering, Calven joined the firm McConnell Dowell and spent six years working across the Pacific, including in Western Sāmoa, American Sāmoa, Pitcairn Island and Fiji.

“That made me realise I didn’t want to work away from the sea, so I specialised as a marine construction engineer.”

A chance opportunity then set the course for the next chapter of his life. While visiting Singapore for his sister’s wedding, he connected with the local McConnell Dowell office and was offered a 12-month secondment opportunity.



Left Calven pictured with the Marina Bay Sands complex in the background.

Above The Marina Bay Sands' Crystal Pavilions under construction.

Below Calven is passing on his passion for rugby to the next generation in Singapore.



More than two decades later, he's still there.

"I went up with a backpack, a computer and a one-year project. And 21 years later, I'm married to a Singaporean, my children are Singaporean, I serve in the Singapore Army – I'm as Singaporean as you can get without being Singaporean."

His professional achievements in that time include leading the construction of major projects such as the Marina Bay Sands promenade, including its Events Plaza and iconic Crystal Pavilions – a complex, three-year around-the-clock build he delivered on time and under budget. He has also worked on major marine infrastructure projects in Hong Kong, Indonesia and other parts of the region.

Calven says being based in Asia has meant he has been able to work on projects he could only have dreamed about back in New Zealand.

"From an engineering perspective, it's all or nothing here," he says. "You can't be half in, half out."

But the pace of that work has not come without its challenges. In 2011, feeling "a little bit burnt out", Calven took a sabbatical year and briefly moved into recruitment, before transitioning into business development – a role he still holds today. He also advocates for women in the engineering industry, encouraging greater diversity and inclusion across the sector.

Outside of work, his drive to build and connect communities has taken on a different form.

A long-time rugby enthusiast, Calven has been deeply involved in Singapore's rugby scene, helping to grow the game at a grassroots level. Over the years he has worked on various committees at the Singapore Rugby Union and served as president of the Wanderers Rugby Club.

"I'm quite possibly the worst

rugby player in the world, but what I am really good at is administration – so I'm a really good rugby administrator."

In 2013, spotting a gap in youth rugby in the country, he co-founded the Titans RFC. Starting with just four children and a couple of mates, the club has since grown to around 350 players and 50 coaches, providing opportunities for boys and girls aged three to 17.

At the core of the club's mission is to create social connectivity.

"I love rugby for the fact that it brings people together from various socioeconomic classes. People don't care if you're the banker's son or the butcher's son; they care about whether you turn up to training and if you're a good team member. It's a great leveller."

He also runs the Wanderers and Titans Foundation, which supports financially constrained and at-risk youth. The foundation helps youth transition to men's rugby and offers internships for employment.

Alongside all this, Calven has maintained his lifelong connection to the military. In 2015, he was the first Westerner to join a newly formed unit in the Singapore armed forces for new citizens and permanent residents.

At 54 years old, he says he is now the "old man of the unit" and will have to retire when he turns 55 later this year. Never one to sit still, though, Calven has already signed up for Singapore's volunteer police force.

And despite building a full life overseas, New Zealand remains close to his heart.

"You name it, I miss it," he says, listing family, friends and meat pies as the first things that come to mind.

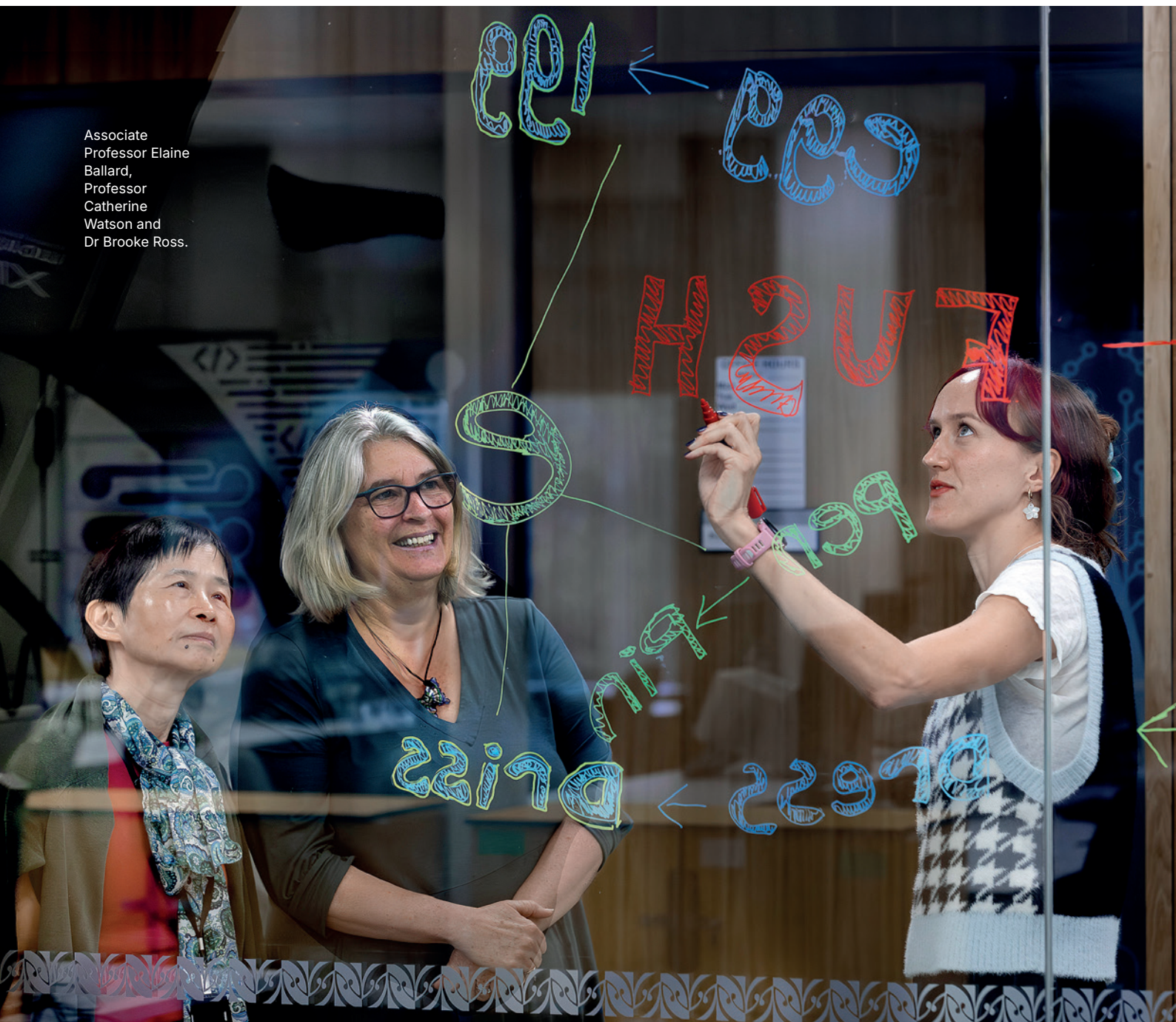
He is also eyeing a return to New Zealand in the next few years, primarily to be closer to his parents and so that his two children – aged 11 and nine – can experience life in Aotearoa.

"I want my kids to grow up as little Kiwis." ■

Sounds like *us*

Ever wondered how New Zealanders started sounding like ‘Nyew Ziliners’? As Janet McAllister discovers, University of Auckland researchers are on the case – and unearthing new insights into the development of our national cultural identity in the process.

Associate Professor Elaine Ballard, Professor Catherine Watson and Dr Brooke Ross.



During my OE in Edinburgh 20 years ago, I tried to borrow a pen from colleagues. “What do you want a pin for?” came the confused answer. “Not a pin – a pehn! Peh-n!” I said slowly, shaping the vowel a bit like the short ‘e’ in *te reo* Māori. “Oh, a pehn!” said the Scots. Before they handed over a ballpoint, they made me say ‘egg’. “Eigg!” they mimicked, giggling.

But young Aucklanders on their OE may no longer encounter such cruel barriers to accessing office supplies, according to a team of linguists: Professor Catherine Watson, Dr Brooke Ross (both in Electrical, Computer and Software Engineering), Associate Professor Elaine Ballard (Psychology) and Professor Miriam Meyerhoff (All Souls College, Oxford).

By looking at how the New Zealand English accent has changed over time, their Marsden-funded research aims to contribute to understandings of our national cultural identity, and shed light on the broader mechanisms of sound change and the impact of social diversity on the way we speak.

In her postgraduate research (supervised by the rest of the team), Brooke examined the vowel pronunciation of Aucklanders born in the mid-to-late 1990s, recorded in 2017/18 when they were aged 18 to 25. And she compared this with the vowel pronunciation of an older Auckland group (aged 40 to 70). She found the Auckland accent is becoming “less broad” – evolving away from some traditional characteristics.

Don’t worry, Brooke reassures that our iconic ‘fush and chups’ vowel “isn’t going anywhere”. Neither is our habit of pronouncing ‘ear’ the same as ‘air’, known as the ‘NEAR-SQUARE merger’. When Catherine moved to Australia for a time, she says “it was news to me the words ‘there’ and ‘their’ were different.” It’s ‘rarely’ an issue – unless it’s ‘really’ an issue.

But that ‘pen/egg’ vowel – known to linguists as the ‘DRESS’ vowel – is definitely moving. Brooke’s research showed that while older Aucklanders (that is, everyone

from older millennials upwards) pronounce it with slightly high, tightened jaws and relatively closed mouths, Gen Z are using a lower, more open mouth shape. So, relatively speaking, their sound is less like ‘driss’, and more like ‘dreh-ss’. ‘Peh-n’, not ‘pin’.

Brooke’s study involved three varied communities: Mt Roskill (new migrants), Papatoetoe (established diversity) and Titirangi (mostly New Zealand European/Pākehā). Unexpectedly, Brooke found the DRESS vowel change in young people in all three suburbs, regardless of ethnic and migrant demographics.

It turns out Auckland’s super-diversity of language and accent groups is perfect for fast-track accent evolution: we’re all trying to be understood by each other. Between 1986 and 2006, Auckland’s overseas-born population grew from 23 percent to 37 percent (it’s now around 43 percent). So, we have a whole city of young people with varied backgrounds who met each other at school aged five, and moved toward ‘peh-n’ in the hope they would not be stabbed with pins by someone trying to be helpful.

What about the rest of the country? Brooke found that older people in Nelson sound like older

people in Auckland – but the DRESS vowel of Nelson’s younger people is somewhere between the older cohort’s high-tight sound and the younger Auckland cohort’s lower, looser sound. So, accents in the rest of the country are changing too, but more slowly, given the regions’ relative lack of population diversity.

More cheekily: Auckland can’t evolve its own clear accent, because the rest of the country keeps copying it.

Generational change

Has Aotearoa New Zealand incubated multiple accents in English in other ways? Sociolinguist Elaine says the ‘cultivated versus broad’ accent gap is shrinking as our cultural cringe reduces. Other variations definitely exist; Taika Waititi celebrated what he called the “Polynesian bouncer” New Zealand accent with his character Korg in *Thor: Ragnarok*, while Southlanders and (separately) Pacific New Zealanders have ‘rhotic’ accents, which make pronounced ‘r’ sounds after vowels.

But “from an overseas perspective, we all sound New Zealand-ish, you know”, says Catherine. “We collectively, as a community – this [accent] is what we came up with. It’s cool. I love the fact that any kid born in New Zealand, growing up, going to school – it doesn’t matter what they look like – they’ll have a New Zealand accent.”

Attending school is why accents in individuals are largely set by age seven, making most accent change generational: children growing up in the same place as their parents will sound slightly different. The New Zealand accent has homogenised over time, and Brooke says people born in the 1920s and 1930s sound recognisably New Zealand to modern ears. When a UK newspaper interviewed Auckland soldiers during the

**“To some extent,
it’s just a whole
bunch of accents
dumped on an
island in the
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and left to do its
own thing for a
hundred years.”**

– DR BROOKE ROSS, FACULTY
OF ENGINEERING & DESIGN



“It’s to do with affirming yourself: ‘I want you to notice that I actually sound like a member of this community.’”

– ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ELAINE BALLARD,
FACULTY OF SCIENCE

Second World War, mention was made of their “rich New Zealand accent”. Says Brooke: “To some extent, it’s just a whole bunch of accents dumped on an island in the middle of nowhere and left to do its own thing for a hundred years.”

But alas, nobody really knows where the ‘fush and chups’ vowel – our very own innovation – comes from. Until recently, people thought it was a post-Second World War phenomenon, the result of a ‘push’ chain reaction of other vowel sounds bumping into each other. We apparently pronounce ‘pan’ like other accents might pronounce ‘pen’, so pen supposedly started sounding like ‘pin’, and in turn, ‘pin’ became more like ‘pun’ – therefore, ‘fish’ to ‘fush’. To use another chain: ‘had’ became ‘head’ became ‘hid’ became ‘hud’.

But as satisfying as that sounds, such vowel changes are actually what researchers call “cognitively complex processes” – they require thinking. That means they don’t really ever happen (laziness, on the other hand, is a more common ‘internal factor’ for accent change: Elaine points out we once all pronounced the ‘k’ in ‘knee’).

So, New Zealand English was thought to be a curious outlier, a mystery. Until, that is, one afternoon in 2023 when Brooke stumbled across a forgotten 1921 doctorate thesis online. Written by an impressive polymath, George E. Thompson, it showed he was hearing ‘fush’ a generation before it was thought

to exist, and also before other vowel sounds in the supposed push-chain had developed. Ergo, everyone’s standard, assumed theory was bunk. At least, it’s probably bunk – part of the Marsden Grant research is attempting to prove the veracity of George’s claims by comparing the vowel sounds of Aucklanders born between 1896 and 1914 to Brooke’s recordings of current generations.

Why did people push the unlikely push-chain theory of Kiwi accent creation?

“I think it was the sheer excitement of, ‘oh, we’re different!’” says Catherine. “It was just cool, you know, ‘Little country down here, punching above our weight’. But the boringness of it all is we [as a field] were measuring the wrong things.”

Or perhaps – just not measuring all the right things. People were measuring vowel sounds from Scots-founded Dunedin and English-founded Christchurch – and marvelling at how the accents were surprisingly similar between those cities, as homogeneity is usually generated by cities each containing multiple accents. But until Brooke’s research, nobody thought to study the voices of New Zealand’s premier city of multiple accents as a set.

In fact, some vowel sounds previously identified as particular to Pacific New Zealand English (when compared with regional New Zealand English) actually turn out to be used by all Aucklanders, Pacific or otherwise. They’re just not used by the rest of New Zealand – yet.

A sense of fellowship

Accent is about identity, so while most change is generational, individuals can and do change their accents. Catherine was on a team that proved the Queen’s pronunciation became more like that of her subjects over the decades, by studying her Christmas broadcasts. As well as

perceived egalitarianism, racism can be a driver for conscious change – and accents can be a matter of life or death.

Multi-ethnic comedian Trevor Noah reports in his autobiography that when he was growing up in South Africa, he was able to build up enough trust to get out of sticky situations by being able to switch between the languages and accents of different black and white communities: “They were ready to do to me violent harm until they felt that we were part of the same tribe, and then we were cool. [...] Maybe I didn’t look like you, but if I spoke like you, I was you.”

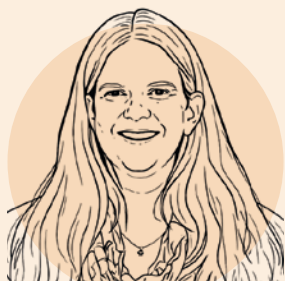
Elaine – who grew up in Auckland in a Chinese family, and who picked up a New Zealand accent at school in the classic way despite not previously speaking English – has noticed New Zealand-born Chinese sometimes have very broad New Zealand accents. “In some ways, I think it’s to do with affirming yourself: ‘I want you to notice that I actually sound like a member of this community. [...] I want to ensure that my identity as a New Zealander is unquestionable.’”

Sometimes problematic, sometimes useful: when any of us hear someone else with our own accent, we usually make assumptions that we share certain cultural understandings. Catherine has previously developed voices for healthcare and communication robots – that study found that for New Zealanders, it’s important the robots speak with a Kiwi accent, and not a pre-programmed American accent, for example.

Says Elaine: “It’s the same thing when you go overseas and then you hear a New Zealand accent across the room – particularly if you haven’t encountered other New Zealanders for a long time. There is a sense of fellowship; they sound just like you.” ■

TIPS ... to safeguard your digital privacy

Recent high-profile data breaches across Aotearoa New Zealand highlight the importance of safeguarding our digital privacy. Auckland Law School Professor Jodi Gardner shares her tips to keep your private information secure online – and where to complain if things go wrong.



**PROFESSOR
JODI GARDNER**

is the Brian Coote Chair in Private Law at Auckland Law School.

1 Be aware your data has value

It's important to realise that your online data is highly valuable to the companies that collect and monetise it – either by selling it to third parties or using the information to personalise advertising content. Companies, therefore, have a financial incentive to collect your information – so be aware of this.

2 Take care with what you share

A lot of information innocently shared online, such as through social media posts, can be used as the basis for scams and fraud. Be careful about posting details such as full names, addresses or employment. And never share important personal information, such as IRD numbers, without first verifying the identity of the other party.

3 Be alert to scams and fraud

In 2024, Kiwis lost more than \$2.3 billion to online scams and fraud, according to the *State of Scams in New Zealand 2025* report by Netsafe and the Global Anti-Scam Alliance. Many of the successful scams arose online, through emails or social media messages, so look out for these fraudulent messages and learn to identify which ones are valid.

4 Prevention is better than a cure

You can actively take steps to prevent breaches to your digital privacy. A key way is to set up multi-factor authentication processes, which require more than one identifying 'factor' to gain access to an account. For example, an email address and password will not be sufficient to gain access to an online account; a second step, such as a code sent to a mobile phone, is necessary.

5 Keep track and delete

It is impossible to always keep all your information private; sometimes you need to provide institutions with your personal information. When this happens, keep track of the information provided, and to whom. You can ask institutions to delete your personal information after a period of time, and you can also delete things like apps that contain this information.

6 Know your rights

There are significant legal limitations on what companies can do with your digital data. The Privacy Act 2020 has 13 'privacy principles' that outline how agencies (including those operating online) can collect, store, use and share your information. Become familiar with your rights and companies' responsibilities when it comes to your digital data.

7 Learn how to make a complaint

Despite the legal obligations and restrictions in place, some companies will breach your digital privacy. If this occurs, all Kiwis have the right to make a complaint to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. This is an Independent Crown Entity, and it is free to make complaints. It also provides helpful resources, including a response date calculator for access and correction requests. ■



Taking issue

Should we extend our parliamentary term?

This year marks the end of another three-year parliamentary term in New Zealand. With the can kicked down the road in terms of a referendum at the 2026 general election on extending our term to four years, the question remains: should we extend our parliamentary term beyond three years?



Peter Davis

A pattern of 'short-termism'

Last year the Justice Select Committee passed a modified version of the proposal for a four-year term of parliament, together with a public

referendum. This has now been scrapped.

So, what is the case for a four-year term?

For a start, New Zealand is one of just eight jurisdictions out of 186 countries with active legislatures that provides for a term of just three years or fewer. Indeed, along with Australia, we are the only countries with a Westminster system of government to have three-year terms.

But the major argument in favour of a longer term is a constitutional and political one – that it could provide for more considered policymaking and therefore for better governance.

There are also financial considerations.

For example, if the dominant pattern becomes, say, two four-year terms rather than three three-year terms as is under the current model, this puts less pressure on the Electoral Commission, particularly if the same rules apply to local body elections.

Further, business reduces investment in election years and governments put off economic and social reforms of long-term consequence when electoral considerations are proximate, underpinning the New Zealand pattern of 'short termism' in policy decision-making.

Any proposal of this nature must get a 75 percent parliamentary majority or pass a referendum. The signs are not good. On both occasions that the issue has been put to the public (in 1967 and 1990) it has been roundly rejected.

The public could well be much better disposed to a four-year term if such a move was part of a wider reform of governance, including reform of parliamentary procedures to give the legislature greater power and effectiveness.

A move to a four-year term would be of value to the future good governance of New Zealand by reducing the frequency of short-term electoral change and by increasing time for consideration, negotiation and scrutiny. However, this would be particularly the case if such a move was taken as a first step in a longer-term process of reform to enhance democracy, transparency and accountability.

Peter Davis is an emeritus professor in Population Health and Social Science.



For other opinions on the subject, see auckland.ac.nz/taking-issue-terms



Lucy Kilgour

Slowing our democratic rhythm

The world is moving faster, but our parliamentary

term should move more slowly.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the rapid change around us. With geopolitical tensions rising, artificial intelligence developing and trend cycles shrinking, stability is scarce. In contrast, parliament is a steady presence and an engine to manage change.

A longer parliamentary term gives Members of Parliament, our representatives, time to represent us, not campaign. With this comes more time to research, digest and respond to rapid global change.

Without an election looming, parties can collaborate without compromising political strategy.

Minor parties in coalitions need not fight for their identity and opposition parties can engage in more bipartisan work. This enhances the stability of parliament, our responsiveness to global change and the durability of such responses.

Young people care deeply about the future they will live in. Sometimes this manifests as activism and civic engagement, but those willing and able to take more decisive actions simply leave New Zealand. There are more opportunities overseas and this directly threatens New Zealand's future. It is a domino effect we cannot afford. Instead, reliable, long-term planning is necessary.

Once plans are under way, successive governments are less likely to cancel them. A longer parliamentary term provides the time to commit and progress work, with the results making New Zealand an attractive place to live. Completion shows politicians keeping their promises, creating trust and stability. Such results demonstrate the importance of voting, which is the greatest check we have on parliament.

This begs the question of whether a longer parliamentary term would compromise our democracy. Voting less often means less feedback from voters to the government, but it equally means there is time to formulate feedback and avoid voter fatigue. With neither compulsory nor preferential voting in New Zealand, engaging voters and everyone making their own best decision are crucial for fulfilling the purposes of elections.

Likewise, with more time between elections, governments need not engage urgency so often and select committees can hear from more voters. Going slower ensures we move in the most desired direction.

When everything is accelerating, slowing our democratic rhythm may be the only way to steer our future wisely.

Lucy Kilgour is studying law and commerce at the University of Auckland and was a 2025 Youth MP.



Marcelo Rodriguez Ferrere

Resist piecemeal changes

Resist piecemeal changes

When Justice Minister Paul Goldsmith

announced in February that the government would no longer progress legislation to extend the term of parliament from three years to four, few were surprised. After all, it had been a year since the introduction of that legislation, and months since the select committee recommended its enactment in August, and the government had kept mum about its plans for the referendum the legislation would require.

For one of the most significant constitutional changes in a generation, the silence and inaction was odd, to say the least. In one sense, then, Minister Goldsmith's scrapping of the bill was a relief: the alternative would be a rushed referendum without proper time to inform the public about the options at play.

Not that such a rushed and ramshackle approach to constitutional change in New Zealand would be out of the norm. For instance, we owe our electoral system, MMP, largely due to a gaffe by then-prime minister David Lange who, after misreading his notes in a debate, accidentally committed New Zealand to a referendum on the electoral system – a commitment that ran against his party's own policy.

There are good arguments for a four-year term – three years is simply too short to effect meaningful policy and change – but there are much, much better arguments for keeping the status quo until we are ready as a country for broader constitutional reform. Attempts – mostly led by the indefatigable former prime minister Sir Geoffrey Palmer – to adopt a codified, supreme constitution have been met with a muted reception from a blasé public.

We seem, as a nation, content to kick the can down the road, operating on principles-based constitutional arrangements that have the benefit of extreme flexibility, but the omnipresent danger of being abused without consequence. We dislike the homework required to answer the hard questions about how we want to apportion and control public power. That maybe explains why we tinker with our constitutional arrangements, and why the four-year term question was considered by itself.

Nothing in our constitutional arrangements operates, however, in such splendid isolation. If we want to extend our term, we should also think about whether we want to restrict the government's use of urgency to pass legislation without appropriate scrutiny. We should think about the status and power of select committees. We should think about the appropriate position and effect of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and whether some rights are so important that parliament should not be able to overrule them. We should think about whether we are content to have King Charles III as our head of state.

Until we are content to think about all of these big questions and approach constitutional reform in a thoughtful, holistic way, we should resist the piecemeal changes that the four-year term parliamentary proposition represented. It will be a courageous government to take on that challenge, but we will be all the better for it as a society. ■

Marcelo Rodriguez Ferrere is an associate professor in the Faculty of Law.

The writers' views reflect personal opinions that may not be those of Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland.



Seohee in Paris

**Working at the cutting edge of social media for an iconic beauty brand in Paris, Seohee Lee is living her dream.
By Caitlin Sykes**

By day she works in social media for a glamorous luxury brand; at night she walks up several flights of stairs to her apartment (in a building with no elevator) in the City of Light.

Seohee Lee's life may have echoes of *Emily in Paris* – the Netflix show about a young, social media-savvy American marketing executive making her way in the fashion capital – however the University of Auckland alumna says her reality is a little different.

“It is very glamorous,” says Seohee, who works as a global social media and influence assistant for Parfums Christian Dior, “but, genuinely, Paris is not for everyone.”

Living in the city is expensive and, although she's studying French, she says there's still a language barrier: “When I first moved here, I was 21 and it was the most exciting time, but also the hardest time of my life because everything is much more difficult ... I love the city, but it's a city that really pushes you.”

Now 24, Seohee's journey to working at the beauty arm of one of the world's most recognisable luxury fashion brands has been characterised by talent, tenacity and a willingness to veer off the linear path.

While a student at Auckland's Rangitoto College, Seohee learned about the University of Auckland's Study Abroad programme, which allows students to complete a semester at an overseas university as part of their degree. It was a major draw to the University, she says, where she initially studied biomedicine, then switched to engineering.

However, it was picking up a marketing paper that ultimately lit a fire under her academic ambitions.

"I ended up doing a BCom, majoring in marketing and information systems. It was quite a switch but I'm glad that I did, because I otherwise wouldn't have gone down the path to this career I have now."

Another decision to switch – from undertaking her Study Abroad semester in London to Milan, where she studied at Bocconi School of Management – turned out to be "life-changing".

"Initially I wanted to go to London, because it's a big city and where everybody goes, but I chose Milan instead at the last minute because it was my dream city. I love fashion," she recalls.

"That was the best decision that I've made, because I was so out of my comfort zone. I was doing a lot of papers in data science and also a technology innovation management paper, which was super-interesting.

"I had the best time. I was surrounded by so many different nationalities, and everybody was so ambitious, because Bocconi is a highly ranked European business school. I was really nervous about going because it was my last semester and I hadn't secured a job after graduation, but I decided to just go and see where it would take me."

The experience cemented a desire to stay in Europe, and the final months of her time in Milan were spent securing a social media intern role with a company in Paris running blockchain events. The market for graduate roles in Europe, however, is super-competitive, says Seohee, with most candidates having at least a masters degree. That prompted her to undertake a masters in marketing and creativity at the London campus of the French ESCP Business School, which led to her current role at Parfums Christian Dior.

The company's products span skincare, makeup and fragrance, and her work in the social media department involves trend spotting, market research, working on social media campaigns and tracking their performance. Keeping up with the latest social media trends in fashion and beauty, and among influencers is also helpful in her other work, as a social media content creator.

Seohee says she started building her own social media presence as another outlet for her love of fashion and beauty, and to build a supplementary income source.

"I'm always looking at influencer content for my work, so I'm constantly learning and getting



"I was really nervous about going because it was my last semester and I hadn't secured a job after graduation, but I decided to just go and see where it would take me."

inspired. Creating my own content allows me to execute some of that learning and share the personal journey that I'm on.

"I'm doing what I love right now, but one day I would love to start my own business."

Inspired by her business-owning dad, Seohee says she has aspired to be her own boss since childhood. While at the University of Auckland, she nurtured her ambitions by getting involved in the Velocity entrepreneurship development programme, delivered by the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

She first became involved in her second year after attending an inspiring talk from a founder, joining the Velocity marketing team and later becoming its

marketing lead. Over two years, she helped shape Velocity's marketing strategy, coordinated campaigns across social media, email and the website and led initiatives such as the Velocity \$100K Challenge, where students pitch their business ideas for investment and incubation.

Ultimately, she says she'd love to create a venture that merges her passions for luxury fashion, social media, AI and inspiring others.

"I love sharing the message through my content that if you really want to move abroad and live your dream life, you can. I've had so many great messages and chats with people about this through the content I create; it's something I'm very passionate about and would love to continue." ■

Distinguished Alumni Awards



Sports executive, artist, judge, physicist, classically trained singer – excellence comes in many different forms. Nikki Addison dives into the diverse talents of the University’s 2026 Distinguished Alumni.

Broadcaster Jack Tame hosted the Taumata ceremony, which celebrated this year’s Distinguished Alumni Award winners at Auckland’s ASB Waterfront Theatre on 2 May.

Despite the group’s diverse careers, they share many of the same qualities: striving to achieve excellence, persevering through challenges big and small, and pursuing their goals with integrity and passion. The concept of service is also a common thread, with each awardee exemplifying what it means to contribute to those around them by sharing their time, ideas, knowledge and creativity.

And, of course, they all found their start at the University of Auckland.

For renowned contemporary visual artist and 2025 Arts Foundation Te Tumu Toi Laureate Reuben Paterson (BFA 1997), studying at Elam School of Fine Arts in the 1990s was a transformative experience.

“Simply being allowed to be there had a big impact on me. Making and creating, sometimes not even knowing why, just driven by a need to make ... it was a huge leap from secondary school to suddenly being a full-time maker.”

Reuben’s work includes sculptures, paintings, animations and installations and is known for its signature use of glitter, which recalls a childhood spent exploring the black sands and sparkling waters of Auckland’s West Coast beaches. For more than 20 years his work has been exhibited internationally across Asia Pacific, North America, the UK and Europe – every artist’s dream.

Left (Left to right) Distinguished Alumni Raelene Castle, Reuben Paterson, Ellen France and John Dudley were honoured at the Taumata ceremony in May. Young Alumnus of the Year Moses Mackay beamed in to the ceremony from his base in Italy.

But with global recognition came a form of contentedness: “I could feel the challenges for the practice beginning to diminish,” he explains. “In a strange way, I had become so used to discomfort that comfort itself started to feel uncomfortable.”

In 2023, seeking new ways to push his craft and allow his work to “live its biggest possible life”, he moved to New York – something he once vowed to do as a young Elam student.

“Maybe that says something about Elam. Dreams spoken there seem to have a way of finding their own path.”

University was equally pivotal for award-winning physicist and science communicator John Dudley (BSc 1987, PhD 1992), who credits the experience as the catalyst for his lengthy academic career.

“Before my PhD, I had no clear intention of working in physics as a long-term career choice. It shaped my outlook on what a scientific career could bring,” he says. An emphasis on enjoying the process of research rather than focusing on results, he adds, was especially influential.

Another factor that resonated was the exposure to new perspectives – something John believes is “absolutely vital” for academics: “Nothing quite prepared me for the sheer breadth of ideas I encountered. Suddenly I was surrounded by experts of all kinds, not only in science.”

He encourages students today to learn as much as they can across fields, to broaden their opportunities and avoid becoming siloed.

Now a professor of physics at Marie and Louis Pasteur

University in Besançon, France, John has made major contributions to the areas of ultrafast optics, supercontinuum generation and nonlinear physics. He has also led global science communication initiatives, such as the UNESCO International Year of Light and Light-based Technologies 2015, which sparked the establishment of the International Day of Light.

But while you might assume these achievements would be career highlights, it’s his role as a teacher that he finds most rewarding.

“It’s a wonderful feeling when you sense that you are changing the ways students see the world,” he says. “I see success through ‘human’ aspects: teaching and mentoring, seeing students graduate, and later following their careers as they are successful in their own lives.”

“Dreams spoken there seem to have a way of finding their own path.”

– REUBEN PATERSON (BFA 1997)

“It’s a wonderful feeling when you sense that you are changing the ways students see the world.”

– JOHN DUDLEY (BSC 1987, PHD 1992)

For Raelene Castle (Ngāpuhi), ONZM (BCom 1993), the group chief executive at Sport New Zealand and High Performance Sport New Zealand, success is determined by resilience.

“Success to me is leaving an organisation or team in a stronger place than you found it.”

The accomplished sports executive – whose past roles include CEO of Netball New Zealand, Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs and Rugby Australia – has plenty of experience taking organisations from strength to strength. As the first female CEO of an NRL team, she oversaw a significant increase in women’s membership of the Bulldogs. She later broke barriers as the first female CEO of Rugby Australia and of Sport New Zealand.

However, achieving such success, she says, is not without difficulty.

“I’ve encountered many challenges, but that is where the real learning takes place and experience is created,” she says. “Without challenges, we wouldn’t grow. My motto is, ‘don’t make the same mistake twice.’”

Loving your work helps when navigating challenging times – something that comes easily



“Success to me is leaving an organisation or team in a stronger place than you found it.”

– RAELENE CASTLE (BCOM 1993)

to Raelene, whose passion for sport goes back to her childhood and includes representing the Auckland region in netball, tennis and lawn bowls.

Having used her Bachelor of Commerce to build a meaningful career, she encourages prospective students to pursue their own interests at the tertiary level.

“Find an area you’re passionate about and use that as a basis to earn a degree. Being passionate about a topic makes you curious to learn more.”

It’s a sentiment echoed by Justice Ellen France, DNZM (LLB(Hons) 1982), who has presided as a judge of the Supreme Court of New Zealand since 2016. What would she say to herself as a young law student in the 1980s?

“I would tell myself how fantastic it was to have found my purpose career-wise,” she says, noting that it was her time

“I would tell my [younger] self how fantastic it was to have found my purpose career-wise.”

– JUSTICE ELLEN FRANCE, DNZM (LLB(HONS) 1982)

at University that sparked what would become a lifelong love of the law.

She would also remind herself to ignore fears of failure and to take every opportunity presented to her – advice that has underpinned an extensive career spanning both legal practice and the judiciary.

Throughout, Ellen has confronted and overcome various hurdles, including an ingrained one: her quiet disposition.

“I became a litigator over ten years after I was admitted to the bar; prior to that I had not appeared in court,” she explains. “Being naturally quiet and a bit shy, learning to project my voice and to be clear and confident when arguing a case in court as a lawyer was a challenge initially.”

She used education and observation to push forward. She acquired the help of a voice coach and dedicated time to watching more experienced lawyers present arguments until her abilities were the best they could be.

For Ellen, the ability to put the law into practice in real situations and in the service of others is ultimately what it’s all about – “remembering and serving the people affected by the court’s decisions”, she says.

Now, with four decades of legal work behind her, she is no less passionate about the law or committed to its cause than when she was a recent graduate. ■



Moses Mackay (BMus 2011) **Young Alumnus of the Year**

University introduced Moses Mackay to many things: fellow creatives set on challenging their craft, the possibility of a career in music and, importantly, the exceptional butter chicken at the student quad.

The latter he would tell his former self to “stop eating”, he jokes from Italy, where he now lives and works as a professional composer, writer and performer.

Since his days at the School of Music, Moses has accumulated a host of achievements, from opening for Elton John and performing in front of Queen Elizabeth II to singing the national anthem at All Blacks test matches and entertaining sold-out audiences as one part of the multi-platinum trio SOL3 MIO.

Not one to be restricted to a specific genre, he has found success on the international opera stage and as an independent artist, with his 2023 solo album *Grace* debuting at number one in New Zealand.

It is the constant challenges presented by music that he loves most: “Whether I’m writing, performing or creating something new, it pushes me to grow and become better,” he says. “There’s always another level to reach; another idea to explore.”

Accepting that some things are outside our control and learning to trust in – and even enjoy – the process has helped him keep sight of his goals. Blocking out external voices has been equally beneficial.

“Don’t listen too much to people who aren’t in the arena chasing their own dreams. Keep your thing, your thing. Comparison is the thief of joy and everyone has their own path, so follow the breadcrumbs.”

With this perspective he has managed to craft a career that blends genres and mediums. But while that may sound difficult, it comes naturally to Moses.

“Success is service. It’s loving what I do and doing it with the people I love. If I can do that, it never feels like work, really.” ■

Page turner

Books have been a source of strength and solace, alumna Morrin Rout tells Donna Chisholm.

Christchurch broadcaster Morrin Rout's memories are charted in books.

As the co-host of a book-focused radio show and a 'chair for hire' at literary festivals, she says books play a major role in her life today.

But they were also part of her primary school days, when they would arrive, wrapped in brown paper and string and sent by the Hamilton librarian Miss Tasker, at her rural Waikato home on the school bus.

Her family lived on a farm in remote Te Ākau, and the books were a lifeline to the world beyond. Morrin laughs that her mother's main problem was trying to keep up with her voracious appetite for reading and says one of her abiding memories of life at boarding school as a teenager was its "dismal" library.

It was always assumed that Morrin would head to university, but she admits giving little thought to her choice of a Bachelor of Arts.

"I didn't think terribly clearly about what I wanted to do. As well as English, I took social sciences and anthropology, because I was really keen to know about other cultures, about how the mind worked ... all those things I hadn't been able to discover or pursue at school."

It was the late 1960s and for her first year at the University of Auckland, Morrin boarded at O'Rorke Hall – then the only mixed-gender accommodation on campus. After her cloistered childhood, the biggest attraction was the excitement of the city.

"Suddenly I was able to live in the middle of a big, interesting city and I could access art galleries and movie theatres and music concerts. It was the sense of a whole wide world opening up."

But with the glamour came a crisis: "I suddenly had this dread that I had no idea what I was going to do. There just seemed to be a big black hole in front of me and I realised I hadn't given any real thought to where a university degree might lead me."

Talked around by her "pragmatic" dad, Morrin finished her degree, graduating in 1970 before heading to teachers' training college. By then she had developed an interest in social work, but there

were no courses in the field, and recruits weren't taken on before the age of 25.

At university, she'd met fellow student Jonty Rout, and the pair married in 1972 and moved to Christchurch, where Jonty had a job as an architect with Miles Warren (later Sir Miles). But "they had too many English teachers down here" – and Morrin started work in advertising at department store Ballantynes.

Following the couple's OE, Morrin became a social worker, and later, after having two children, a family court counsellor. It was a job where books not only built her skills but also helped her handle the emotional trauma.

"Books put you into the lives of other people and help your skills with empathy and understanding. That's what reading good fiction does."

Through a friend, Morrin was hired to co-present a six-week Plains FM programme celebrating women writers for the centennial of women's suffrage in 1993. The following year, the *Bookenz* radio programme, which she continues to co-host today, was born. The programme, which features author interviews, book reviews and literary news (and is also available as a podcast), launched Morrin into years of book-related jobs. She helped to establish and then directed the Hagley Writers' Institute, a creative writing course at Hagley College, and became co-programme director of the Christchurch Writers Festival.

But a personal tragedy was to prove once again that her love of books meant more to her than a job. When husband Jonty died prematurely in 2003, aged just 55, they were, again, a lifeline.



"After he died, I had this awful thought that I wouldn't be able to read books and absorb them ... that books wouldn't distract me. But, fortunately, quite the opposite happened. Books saved me again."

She recently retired as a board trustee of WORD Christchurch, which runs the city's annual writers festival, and now describes herself as "a chair for hire", recently facilitating two sessions at the RAWA readers and writers festival in Akaroa.

In 2025 she received the MNZM for her contributions to Christchurch's arts and literature communities, but she downplays her role.

"When I look at people who have done huge amounts with their lives, mine seems pretty trivial. I read books, I talk to writers, I go around doing my thing. Most of it's been voluntary because I've loved it and I've been privileged to be able to do it." ■

GOLDEN GRADUATES

Our Golden Graduates are those who graduated from the University of Auckland 50 or more years ago, along with graduates aged 70 and over.

Around the globe

James Fyfe checks in with alumni in Mongolia, the US and New Caledonia.



Bat-Erdene Bayarsaikhan

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

After graduating with a Master of Public Policy, Manaaki Scholar Bat-Erdene Bayarsaikhan (Bagi) is now back home in Mongolia putting his new skills into practice.

Bat-Erdene is a project manager for People in Need, a Czech-headquartered NGO that carries out humanitarian work and long-term development projects around the world.

Based in Ulaanbaatar, Bat-Erdene is leading an initiative focused on empowering civil society organisations in Mongolia to drive digital transformation and build climate resilience, while also encouraging more inclusive governance.

“I’ve always had a passion for working in social development and the humanitarian sector, and I can see a real impact on the people here,” he says.

In addition to his love of hiking and *The Lord of the Rings*, the 29-year-old was attracted to studying in New Zealand due

“Studying in New Zealand helped me to grow professionally and reflect on myself personally.”

to the country’s consistently strong performance in global e-governance and e-participation rankings.

“I realised that the New Zealand Government has really encouraged the participation of its citizens,” he says. “However, in Mongolia, it’s quite different. Many policy challenges still face barriers related to participation and inclusivity.”

Bat-Erdene worked at People in Need before moving to Auckland, and he has returned to the NGO with a new

perspective not just on public policy but also on himself. He says his degree strengthened his ability to analyse complex governance challenges, assess stakeholder dynamics, and design more inclusive, evidence-informed policy approaches.

“Studying in New Zealand helped me to grow professionally and reflect on myself personally,” he says. “It also gave me confidence.”

The highlight of his time in New Zealand was being able to fly his parents over to watch his completion ceremony.

“They had never travelled abroad and seeing them in their traditional Mongolian attire [deel] in the ceremony hall made me emotional. It was a really proud moment,” he says.

His next professional goal is to learn to coordinate several major projects at a time. And once his current multi-year initiative concludes, he hopes to head overseas again to further develop his professional skills and experience – knowledge he plans to once more bring back home to support his fellow Mongolians.



Fay Abdul Ghani

Jacksonville, Florida, US

From the University of Auckland to the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, Fay Abdul Ghani is shooting for the stars with her biomedical science career.

Based in Florida, Fay is a research technologist at the Mayo Clinic's Center for Regenerative Biotherapeutics. Her lab works closely with NASA to investigate stem-cell biology and cellular therapeutics in space.

"We're studying stem cells and trying to understand how they expand, how they self-renew and how they turn into more specialised cell types in microgravity conditions."

Fay, who was born in New Zealand to Iraqi parents, moved to the US three years ago after earning a Bachelor of Biomedical Science (Honours) in Auckland.

Now, by looking at the effect of microgravity on stem cells in space, Fay and her team hope to one day help people who require stem-cell therapies.

"By possibly having stem cells grow better in space, we could tap into those benefits and produce clinical-grade stem cells in space and then use them in patients in the future."

To conduct their experiments, Fay's team collaborates with NASA and astronauts aboard the International Space Station. Her work also makes her a regular visitor to the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral. And while seeing a rocket blast off carrying her team's work never gets old, she says the first time it happened was definitely a "pinch-me moment".

"I was like, oh my God, I'm a NASA-invited guest – this is crazy. How is this happening?"

The 26-year-old is also passionate about science communication and has received multiple accolades for both her research and outreach work, including the prestigious International Astronautical Federation's Emerging Space Leader award.

Further down the road, Fay would like to do a PhD and eventually be in charge of her own lab. With commercial space travel on the horizon, she also dreams of one day visiting space.

"What if in the future we could have a specialised stem-cell lab in space, where as a scientist you could go and visit? It sounds crazy, but it seems to me that this is the direction we are heading."

Cameron Diver

Nouméa, New Caledonia

After following his then-girlfriend (now wife) to New Caledonia more than two decades ago, Cameron Diver is still living on the island he arrived at almost by chance.

Today, as chief conservation officer at global NGO Island Conservation, he's protecting the fragile ecosystems of islands around the world.

"Going to New Caledonia was a real voyage of discovery for me. It's been a place where I've had some wonderful opportunities, and it's been great for my family."

Born in Cambridge and raised in the King Country, Cameron graduated from the University of Auckland in 2000 with a conjoint Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws. He describes his time at the University as foundational.

"I think that what I did at the University of Auckland gave me the tools I needed to evolve," he says. "I wouldn't have been able to do that without the quality of tertiary education and the subjects that I took."

That experience laid the platform for a career spanning law, diplomacy and international conservation. After also earning a Master of Public Law and a Master of International Relations from the University of New Caledonia, Cameron worked in the New Caledonian government's legal department and with the Pacific Community (SPC), an intergovernmental organisation supporting sustainable development in the Pacific. He also served as a Special Envoy for Small Island Developing States on an initiative to establish the International Platform for Ocean Sustainability, among other roles.

He credits his French studies at the University of Auckland with opening the door to the Francophone world. Today, the language is second nature to him, and his two teenage children have been raised bilingual. He describes their household as a "joyous melting pot of languages".

A life spent between Aotearoa and New Caledonia has also influenced his worldview.

"It's made me realise how valuable it is to have an island perspective on the world and on life, rather than only a continental one," he says.

"Islands like New Caledonia are not only vulnerable, they're also catalysts for solutions that can be scaled up and shared elsewhere." ■



Ruth Diver with
Gisèle Pelicot
and co-translator
Natasha Lehrer
following the launch
of *A Hymn to Life*.

A life in translation

How many of us reading *War and Peace*, for example, think of the original Russian text and admire the mammoth task of its English translators?

The art of a literary translator is, in many ways, not to call attention to their craft; instead, it's to create a seamless experience from one language to another.

What they do have to be good at, says Ruth Diver, literary translator, alumna and former University staffer, is recreating the music of the original text and its effect on the reader.

"Does it convey the same sort of emotion or surprise?"

You must also be a very good reader of the source language – in Ruth's case, French (she's also fluent in German and Russian) – and have excellent writing skills in the target language.

"A lot of what makes literature interesting is the way authors play with the language, so you need to understand what they're doing to start with," she says.

Ruth, who has translated more than a dozen works of French literature into English, has recently gained international attention as the co-translator of the high-profile Gisèle Pelicot memoir *A Hymn to Life: Shame has to Change Sides (Et la joie de vivre)*, co-written by French author Judith Perrignon.

The book was concurrently translated into 22 languages and is topping bestseller lists globally.

"It starts with Gisèle's discovery of the horrific abuse she endured at the hands of her husband, who drugged and raped her over the course of a decade and invited countless [at least 80] other men to do the same," says Ruth.

"But it goes all the way back to her childhood and is really the story of how she found the strength to face an

Ruth Diver is experiencing wild success as a literary translator, including co-translating the English version of the bestselling Gisèle Pelicot memoir. By Julianne Evans

open trial and build a new life for herself."

Both Ruth and co-translator Natasha Lehrer found the work intense.

"Natasha and I were doing a tag team effort to meet a tight deadline, she in France, me in New Zealand. She would translate around 1,500 words a day, then send the document to me to edit, and I would do the same and send it back to her – so much discussion in the comment boxes!"

They were grateful to share the load.

"We were constantly on the phone to each other. Sometimes she would be in tears, sometimes I would be, but we had signed a non-disclosure agreement and couldn't involve anyone else. I don't think we realised how big the book would be."

She says that really hit home at the launch of the English edition at Royal Festival Hall in London.

"There were Natasha and I, sitting in the middle of the stalls, watching our words being read on stage by Juliet Stevenson, Kristin Scott-Thomas and Kate Winslet, national treasures of stage and screen."

Ruth was also in London to receive the prestigious Scott Moncrieff Prize from the UK Society of Authors, an annual award for translations into English of high-quality, full-length French works.

The winning work, *The Convoy* by Rwandan French author Beata Umubyeyi Mairesse, is the author's account of being a 15-year-old Tutsi girl who narrowly escapes being murdered during the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

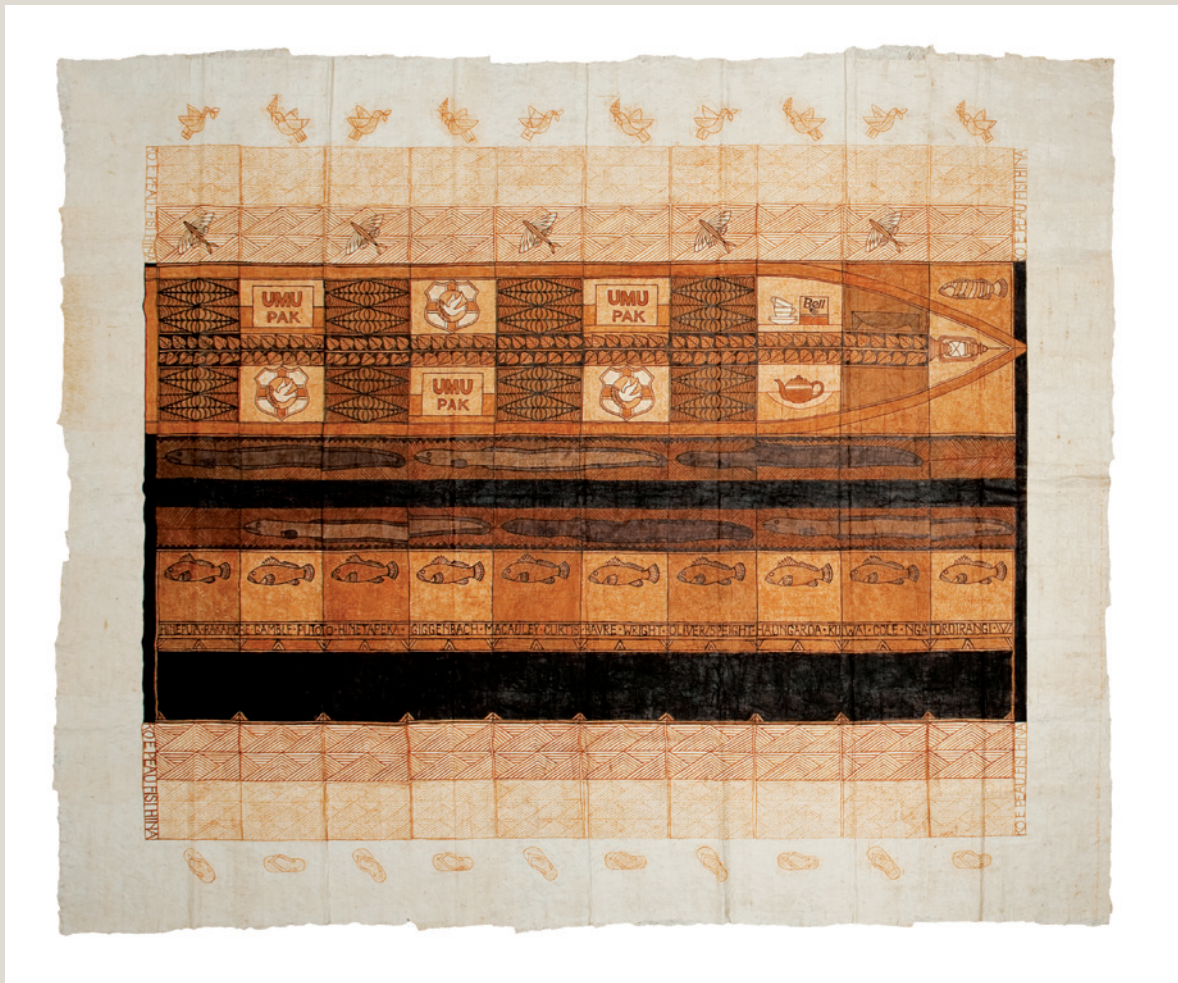
Ruth is clearly not afraid of tackling hard subjects.

"Well, I certainly find them satisfying to work on, and it's so important to treat that sort of text with great care."

Her "outrageously international" background includes doing all her schooling in French (her father's UNESCO job was Paris based), a first degree in Russian in the US, and living in Austria and Germany, where she learnt German and had two children.

She completed a masters and PhD in comparative literature, co-registered between the University of Paris 8 and Auckland, later becoming head of comparative literature at the latter. Then a literary translation course came up in London and all the pieces fell into place.

"But I would never have dreamed when I resigned from the University that, within a few years, I'd be translating a phenomenal bestseller and winning the most coveted prize in the industry," she says. "It's clearly never too late to reinvent yourself!" ■



Ocean alleys

Jandals, commonly worn across Oceania, tread a path along this panel of ‘Siu I Moana’ (2011) by artists Dame Robin White, a Distinguished Alumna, and Ruha Fifita.

Meaning ‘reaching across the ocean’, ‘Siu I Moana’ consists of three panels, which explore threads of connection and exchange between Aotearoa New Zealand and Tonga. Dame Robin (Ngāti Awa, Pākehā) and Ruha (Vava’u, Tonga, Palangi) created the work in collaboration with the women of Haveluloto, Tonga, and with the blessing and guidance of Dowager Lady Tunakaimanu Fielakepa – an authority on the handmade textiles produced by women in Tonga.

Each part of the triptych of ngatu fuatanga (marked barkcloth) measures approximately six-by-four metres. Running through this panel, called ‘Tonga to New Zealand’, is the halakafa – a central band that serves as both a symbolic pathway and as a practical space for fastening the cloth with rope when it is worn or wrapped. Here, it also signifies the volcanic ridge that runs between the two nations.

Along either side are depictions of sea-life – migratory eels, flying fish and the Tongan grouper – interwoven with symbols of human migration: the ‘umu pack’ – commonly used to send food items from Tonga to family in New Zealand – and the logo of Tonga’s rugby team.

‘Siu I Moana’ is displayed in the atrium of the Science Centre on the University’s City Campus. ■

A tale of many truths

Journalist-turned-novelist Karen Holdom created her first work of fiction grounded in truth. By Denise Montgomery

Karen Holdom first encountered Edmund Baton's name on a Normandy hilltop.

Around a decade ago, while reading soldiers' names at the German War Cemetery at Mont-de-Huisnes, she noticed it wasn't just men buried there, but also women, teenage boys and children.

Karen Holdom, who writes as K.J. Holdom



Later, she read a pamphlet of soldiers' stories, which included a few lines about Edmund, a 14-year-old who died at La Chauvinerie civilian internment camp in France. He was among thousands of German civilians cleared from Alsace-Lorraine by Western Allied troops as they passed into Germany in 1945.

"Edmund had journeyed 500km across his war-torn homeland in a bid to get home. At the time, he was around the same age as the eldest of my three sons, and the thought of a kid my son's age, in that landscape, was hard to comprehend."

The atrocious conditions and death rate at La Chauvinerie later triggered a national scandal. Edmund, and what his life might have been, stayed with Karen until she began writing her first novel, in which he is renamed Max Bernot.

"I didn't plan to investigate or research his story," says Karen, who has 30 years' experience as a journalist. "But that's what I ended up doing. My journalistic instincts forced me to check things out, do a little bit of digging."

She sent off a few email enquiries to Germany, and within days received a reply from Joseph Baton, Edmund's 85-year-old French cousin and childhood friend. Soon after, Joseph and his cousin Elisabeth Paulus (known as Lilli), who was Edmund's German sister, invited Karen to meet them in France.

A few weeks later, she was sitting in Joseph's home in Saint-Avold, Moselle, poring over fragile letters, documents, postcards and photographs.

"They opened their doors and their hearts to a stranger from the other end of the planet."

That generosity shaped *The End and the Beginning* (Simon & Schuster), which began as a manuscript developed while Karen completed a Master of Creative Writing at the University of Auckland in 2019. The book was completed following five subsequent years of research and drafting.

Karen retraced Edmund's journey through France and Germany, returning to the family and listening as long-silent, sometimes contradictory, memories surfaced. A friend offered an early anchor: the idea of multiple truths, all shifting over time.

"I trusted what people were saying because they were telling me their truth," she says. "Those truths can contradict each other."

La Chauvinerie was not a death camp, but it was marked by corruption, starvation and neglect.

"The overall death rate at La Chauvinerie was seven times higher than at other internment camps in France. It was a drop in the ocean compared to the lives lost in the Nazi death camps, but it was a terrible scandal because the Republic of France provided money to feed these people properly. The camp director didn't do that. He even sold the babies' milk on the black market. Not one baby born in the camp survived."

Most important to Karen were the letters Edmund wrote from La Chauvinerie. They begin with hope, but soon describe starvation, diarrhoea and disease. Days later, he was dead of 'dysentery and weakness of the heart', according to camp records.

Karen's most significant archival discovery came in the French National Archives, where she found a carbon copy of the Inspector General's post-war investigation. "It showed in devastating detail how prisoners suffered."

In the novel, the setting – including troop movements, dates, weather and geography – is factual. Around that framework, Karen allowed herself to imagine.

Her research later informed a small exhibition at the German cemetery in Normandy. While Karen had shared all her significant research with the family, the final step was showing them photos of the exhibition, which she says "just felt right".

"The thing about history is that small, ordinary people's stories often get forgotten."

She says Edmund's family is happy with the book.

"I kept stressing it was going to be a work of fiction. You can't come into these people's lives and then go off and write a novel without being clear that you'll be inventing things.

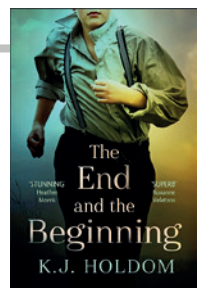
"But they never had a problem with it. They understood it completely." ■



Win a copy of *The End and the Beginning*

Email ingenio@auckland.ac.nz with the

book title in the subject line and your details in the email.





Podcast Picks

Dr Alex McAuley is a senior lecturer in classics and an expert in ancient Greek history and language in the School of Humanities, as well as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. He shares his podcast picks with Nikki Addison.

What podcast are you currently listening to?

I'm on a bit of an intelligence kick and listening to *The Rest Is Classified*, a brilliantly written podcast hosted by a former CIA analyst and a long-serving BBC intelligence journalist. Long-form podcasts on intelligence stories from around the world make for listening that's fun, fascinating and sometimes eerily relevant.

What's next on your episode list?

I'm going to wrap up the series on Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner and Putin's Russia – an amazing saga that unites so many threads of contemporary global security.

What's your favourite podcast or podcaster, and why?

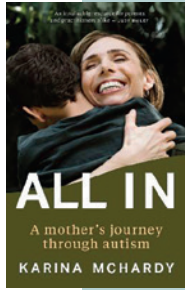
I'm a huge fan of *The Rest Is Politics*: two guys from opposite sides of the political spectrum with vastly different life experiences come together to 'disagree agreeably' on a huge range of questions relating to politics and society. It's never been more necessary than now.

Do you have a comfort podcast?

Ed Gamble and James Acaster's *Off Menu* podcast is a go-to for absolutely hilarious chat in the world of celebrities and food. Anything ice-hockey related is always great too – *32 Thoughts* is great! As a French-Canadian, I try to listen to as many French podcasts as I can from RFI and Radio-Canada.

Are there any podcasts in your area of expertise that you would recommend to others?

Empire hosted by William Dalrymple and Anita Anand is beautifully presented and covers a whole range of the ancient world. *The Classics Podcast* from the UK Classical Association is also a great platform for anyone wanting to learn more about the ancient world! ■



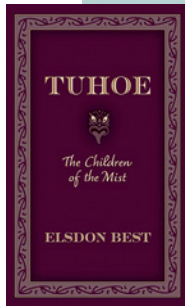
All In

Subtitled 'a mother's journey through autism', this memoir by FMHS alumna and 40 Under 40 awardee Karina McHardy shares her experiences supporting her son 'Max' (a pseudonym) following his autism diagnosis. The book also shines a light on problems with New Zealand's support systems for families. **Karina McHardy, Bateman Books, \$45**



Claude Megson, Architect

As a teacher, New Zealand architect Claude Megson influenced generations of architects who studied at the University of Auckland's School of Architecture. These included architect Giles Reid, who has co-produced this book with photographer Jackie Meiring recognising Megson's legacy. **Giles Reid and Jackie Meiring, Massey University Press, \$75**



Tuho: Children of the Mist

During the early twentieth century, ethnologist Elsdon Best lived in the Urewera region, recording the culture, beliefs, customs and whakapapa of the Ngāi Tūhoe people. This two-volume work has come back into print 100 years later with the guidance of sociology alumnus Dr Rāpata Wiri (Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Ruapani). **Elsdon Best, preface by Rāpata Wiri; Oratia Books; \$100**



The Emotion Dealer

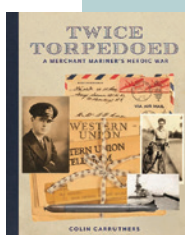
Master of Creative Writing alumnus Jack Remiel Cottrell's second book of short fiction is described as a kaleidoscopic exploration of technology, art, cities, capitalism, loneliness and greed. It includes tales of heartbreak, betrayal and technology gone awry. **Jack Remiel Cottrell, Canterbury University Press, \$30**

Between

Arts alumna Sue Fitchett's latest poetry collection is themed around the boundaries of what is certain and what is not. It also examines the space that exists between, described as 'where it's possible to pause a while and consider what it is we are doing on this planet of ours and who it is we are'. **Sue Fitchett, The Cuba Press, \$30**

Twice Torpedoed

Law alumnus Colin Carruthers shares this story of his uncle and namesake, Colin Watt – one of 140 New Zealand merchant seamen who were killed in the Second World War. Colin produced this account over a decade, drawing in part on his uncle's own letters, accounts and photographs sent home to family. **Colin Carruthers, Ugly Hill Press, \$50 ■**



Links to the above podcasts can be found in the story online at auckland.ac.nz/ingenio

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JOIN

The Chinese Alumni Club

Stay connected with fellow Chinese graduates through the University of Auckland Chinese Alumni Club. The club hosts regular events for networking, socialising and celebrating the achievements of Chinese alumni and provides mentorship to support current students. Join the group by contacting president Rachel Yang to be added to the WeChat community.

email: uoa.chinese.alumni@gmail.com



TOUR

Hiwa Recreation Centre

The state-of-the-art City Campus recreation centre, Hiwa, is open to the community and offers a wide range of facilities, including sports halls and courts, fitness studios, pools and a rooftop turf. Want to check it out? Sign up below and take a tour with a member of the Alumni Relations team.

tinyurl.com/uoa-hiwa-tour

GIVE
BACK

While gaining strategic insights

Did you know you can connect with our talented postgraduate business students for research and analysis to help address your business challenges? And it's completely free. Access university-standard research and evidence-based recommendations across ten disciplines, while supporting emerging talent. Semester Two projects start in July and you can express your interest now: auckland.ac.nz/projects-business-society



TACKLE

Sustainability problems

A collaboration between *Newsroom* and the University of Auckland's Sustainability Hub, 'Planetary Solutions' connects world-class academic expertise with real-world action – empowering communities, decision makers and changemakers to respond to the defining challenges of our time. Dive deep into the climate crisis, sustainability, innovation and systems change, and explore the ideas, science and leadership shaping our planet's future.

newsroom.co.nz/category/planetary-solutions/



TAKE 10

With our Scientists

This ongoing series allows readers to dive into the fascinating world of discovery at the University of Auckland's Faculty of Science. From mind-blowing breakthroughs to everyday science explained simply, our researchers share big ideas in bite-sized, ten-minute talks designed to spark curiosity and conversation. Take 10 with our Scientists makes it easy to connect with the people and innovations shaping our future: auckland.ac.nz/take-10



IMMERSE YOURSELF

In the world of jazz

Free and open to the public, the University's weekly jazz forums are where soulful improvisations, infectious rhythms and innovative harmonies come alive. Form the audience for our students as they share and develop their creative practice, on Wednesdays during semester time, 4-6pm, Studio One, Kenneth Myers Centre, 74 Shortland Street, Auckland City.

auckland.ac.nz/jazz-forums

BE INSPIRED

By next-generation research leaders

Join us for this year's University of Auckland Three Minute Thesis (3MT) final, where top doctoral researchers present their groundbreaking work in just three minutes. Part of a global competition held at more than 900 universities across 85 countries, 3MT celebrates the excellence, passion and impact of emerging scholars. Register to attend this event, held on 17 July: auckland.ac.nz/3mt



SAVE

On travel

Make the most of your next trip by booking with House of Travel Auckland City and get an exclusive five percent stackable discount on select Contiki, Trafalgar, Insight and Costsaver itineraries. Terms and conditions apply. Check out this deal and other alumni benefits now: auckland.ac.nz/en/alumni/what-we-offer-you/alumni-benefits



SUPPORT

Student well-being

As winter approaches, many students face rising living costs and unexpected financial pressure. A gift to the Student Emergency and Well-being Fund helps provide immediate support for those experiencing hardship, covering essentials like food, accommodation and well-being services when they are needed most. Your generosity can make a real difference, helping students stay safe, supported and focused on their studies.

donate.auckland.ac.nz/student-emergency-and-wellbeing-fund



What career advice would you give your younger self?

We're looking for alumni to help students take the next step in their career through our Alumni Connect informal mentoring programme.



**SIGN UP
ONLINE**

connect.auckland.ac.nz

15 MINUTES IS ALL IT TAKES.

As a mentor, you'll get to choose how much time you put in.

IT'S EASY.

Nearly 4,000 alumni and students are already using Alumni Connect. Will you join them?



"As an alumnus, it's a great feeling to give back and engage with talented students and new graduates seeking practical advice and feedback on career opportunities."

AARON ROSS
MBA 2017



By 30 March 2026 we had a total of 3,976 Alumni Connect participants, including 1,831 alumni and 2,145 students



Waipapa
Taumata Rau
**University
of Auckland**