WAIPAPA TAUMATA RAU / UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND / ALUMNI MAGAZINE / SPRING 2026

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ORIGIN STORIES

The Liggins Institute looks ahead



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Leadership for our times

RAIN OR SHINE
The changing Kiwi summer

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Is Auckland at risk?

auckland.ac.nz/ingenio



Deck the halls

Members of the University's Staff Choir and wider community gather around a giant Christmas tree at last year's 'Carols in the ClockTower'. The annual event is a highlight of the festive calendar on campus.

To view the 2025 performance, visit tinyurl.com/2025-clocktower-carols



Big picture

Ingenio

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Waipapa Taumata Rau
University of Auckland



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A meeting house of ideas



PROFESSOR NIC SMITH
Vice-Chancellor
Waipapa Taumata Rau,
University of Auckland

Returning to Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland as vice-chancellor has felt, in many ways, like coming home.

I first arrived here as an undergraduate engineering student, curious about the world and unsure where that journey might lead. In time, I had the privilege of returning to the Faculty of Engineering and Design as dean.

So, at the pōwhiri welcoming me as vice-chancellor, seeing members of the South Pacific Indigenous Engineering Students group perform the faculty haka, *Me Hoki Whakamuri Kia Anga Whakamua*, was particularly moving.

Its message – to acknowledge the past and move boldly into the future – has stayed with me.

It speaks to my own relationship with this University, but also captures something important about universities themselves.

For centuries, universities have been driven by three fundamental purposes: to develop people, to create new understanding, and to strengthen society's capacity to make wise decisions. These purposes endure. What is changing, often quickly, is the world in which we pursue them.

That makes our role more important, not less.

We live in a time when complex questions can too easily be reduced to simple positions. Public debate can become polarised, and disagreement personal. Yet the problems that matter most rarely divide into black and white. They demand curiosity, evidence, humility and empathy.

A university should be a place where these characteristics are embraced.

I want Waipapa Taumata Rau to be a true meeting house of ideas: where different perspectives come together respectfully, where ideas are tested vigorously (but not personally), and where we are willing to change our minds when evidence or others' insights give us reason.

That same open-mindedness is essential when considering the future.

Some of society's greatest challenges – in education, health, the environment and social cohesion – cannot be solved within an electoral cycle, financial year or news cycle. Instead, they require us to invest in possibilities whose full value may not be apparent for years – even generations.

I have already been reminded how much talent exists across this University. Behind many of its celebrated discoveries and innovations are years of persistence, collaboration and accumulated knowledge. An idea explored by one researcher may be developed by another, taken in an unexpected direction by a student, and eventually become something that transforms lives.

We should be confident about that contribution – but never insular about it.

A meeting house needs open doors. Part of our responsibility is to connect the knowledge created here with our communities: to make complex ideas accessible without diminishing them, to invite people into the conversation, and to listen as well as speak. If we do that well, the University isn't an ivory tower set apart from society, but an active participant in helping society understand itself and imagine what might come next.

Nowhere is this more important than in how we prepare our students. Technology, particularly the rapid development of AI, is changing the nature of work. Our graduates will certainly need technical capability. But I believe their greatest advantage will come from qualities that allow them to transcend any particular technology: the ability to understand a diverse world from multiple perspectives, communicate with people unlike themselves, navigate uncertainty, make sense of complexity and continue learning. These are deeply human capabilities – and those of future leaders.

When I consider what lies ahead for Waipapa Taumata Rau, I return to *Me Hoki Whakamuri Kia Anga Whakamua*.

We can be proud of the traditions, knowledge and people who have shaped this University, while being restless about what more we can contribute. We can hold fast to the enduring purpose of a university while being bold enough to rethink how we fulfil it. And we can create an institution that is confident to convene difficult conversations, patient in pursuit of ideas over generations, and open to sharing its discoveries.

That is an exciting future to be part of – and one I feel enormously privileged to have the opportunity to help shape. ■

We can be proud of the traditions, knowledge and people who have shaped this University, while being restless about what more we can contribute.

PHOTO: CHRIS LOUFTE

Department of Cancer Sciences launched

The new University of Auckland department will supersize patient care and research into New Zealand's leading cause of death. By Rose Davis and Caryn Wilkinson

Associate Professor Ben Lawrence has a strong sense of what New Zealand needs to do to up its cancer treatment game.

He stepped down as clinical lead of oncology at Auckland City Hospital to take up his new role as the first head of the University of Auckland's new Department of Cancer Sciences.

Ben's vision is for the new department to launch the country's first comprehensive cancer centre within the next decade.

"The quality of cancer researchers and clinicians in New Zealand is extraordinary, but we don't offer an environment that brings out the best in them," says Ben, who will continue working two days a week at Auckland Hospital.

"We want to remove the barriers and provide a space where their abilities can shine," he says.

Cancer is the leading cause of death in New Zealand. The Cancer Control Agency projects the present around 30,000 cases a year to rise to more than 45,000 by 2044 due to population growth and ageing.

The department, which was launched in July, brings together the Auckland Cancer Society Research Centre, the Department of Oncology, and Cancer Trials New Zealand, with more cancer researchers to join from across the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, the Faculty of Science and from throughout the University. It will also create opportunities for collaboration across Health New Zealand, Te Whatu Ora, the community and international research partnerships.

The vision is to offer the best care to patients with all types of cancer – and that starts with research to develop better care strategies, says Ben.

The new centre will include everything from research about prevention and screening to developing new drugs in the lab and offering clinical trials for promising new treatments, he says.

"Research shows cancer care is better in places that do cutting-edge research, and research is better in places that do clinical care, because researchers can understand the problems and ask the right research questions."

Ben says New Zealand spends less on cancer research and medicines than similar OECD countries. He expects significant philanthropic funding will be needed to turn the dream of a new cancer centre into a reality.

The department builds on a distinguished legacy of cancer research at the University, particularly through the Auckland Cancer Society Research Centre. Established in 1956 through a community-funded partnership between the University of Auckland and Cancer Society Auckland Northland, the centre became internationally recognised for its contributions to cancer discovery and drug development.

Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences Dean Professor Warwick Bagg acknowledged the longstanding contribution of the Cancer Society Auckland Northland and the many donors whose support has helped build cancer research capability at the University.

"The achievements of cancer research at the University of Auckland have been made possible through decades of partnership and philanthropy. We are deeply grateful to Cancer Society Auckland Northland and the many supporters and donors who have invested in better outcomes for people with cancer. Their contribution has helped create the platform for this exciting new chapter in cancer sciences."

Adds Ben: "The Auckland Cancer Society Research Centre has played a vital role in advancing cancer science in New Zealand for decades. We are proud to build on that foundation."



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR BEN LAWRENCE heads the University's new Department of Cancer Sciences. PHOTO: CHRIS LOUFTE

FULL STORIES:
auckland.ac.nz/cancer-sciences-department and auckland.ac.nz/dcs-ben-lawrence



Auckland ranked among world's best student cities

A combination of world-class education, diversity, lifestyle and opportunity has seen Auckland rank 26th globally and number one in New Zealand in the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Best Student Cities 2027.

The result reflects the contribution of both the University of Auckland and Auckland University of Technology, and the broader strengths of Auckland's tertiary education sector.

The QS rankings also show that one of Auckland's standout strengths is its diversity. The city is ranked among the world's top student destinations for student mix, reflecting its large and internationally diverse student population. Students benefit from studying alongside people from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds, with that diversity broadening perspectives, building global connections and enriching the student experience.

The ranking also recognises Auckland's desirability as a place to live and study.

"Beyond the classroom, students have access to a city that combines career opportunities, arts and culture, natural attractions and a high quality of life," says the University's Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education, Professor Sarah Young.

The city also performs strongly in measures relating to employer activity, reflecting Auckland's position as New Zealand's economic centre and its strong connections with employers, industry, government and community organisations.

"Those links help students gain valuable experience and develop pathways into future careers," says Sarah. ■

FULL STORY:
auckland.ac.nz/qs-student-cities-2027



Associate Professor Tanya Evans

Girls-only schools outperform for STEM pathways

Female students from single-sex schools were overrepresented among female engineering and computer science students at the University of Auckland, according to a recent study.

Research published in the journal *Educational Studies in Mathematics* explored links between single-sex education for girls and pathways into the male-dominated fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

The research, which drew on data from 2016 to 2020, found no similar effect occurred for male students who had attended boys' schools.

In New Zealand, about 11 percent of students attend single-sex schools, most of which are state or state-integrated institutions, according to the Ministry of Education.

At the University of Auckland, 42 percent of female engineering students had attended single-sex secondary schools. For computer science, the figure was 40 percent.

"There's something in the water at girls-only schools in New Zealand," says Tanya Evans, an associate professor of mathematics education at the University.

"If we could bottle it, we could help girls thrive in maths and STEM across all of our schools." ■

FULL STORY:
auckland.ac.nz/girls-stem-pathways

Liggins Institute campaign aims for 'moonshots'

The Liggins Institute has set six ambitious targets to accelerate its next generation of health breakthroughs, building on its research that has transformed the lives of millions of babies and families worldwide.

The University has launched a $25 million fundraising campaign, 'In our hands: A healthy start for a healthy life', to support six 'moonshots'. These include ensuring healthy beginnings for every family; delivering personalised nutrition for babies born too soon; giving every child a path to treatment; developing new 'living medicines'; nurturing tomorrow's clinician scientists; and building the digital future of healthcare.

The campaign launches with $12 million already committed by philanthropic supporters.

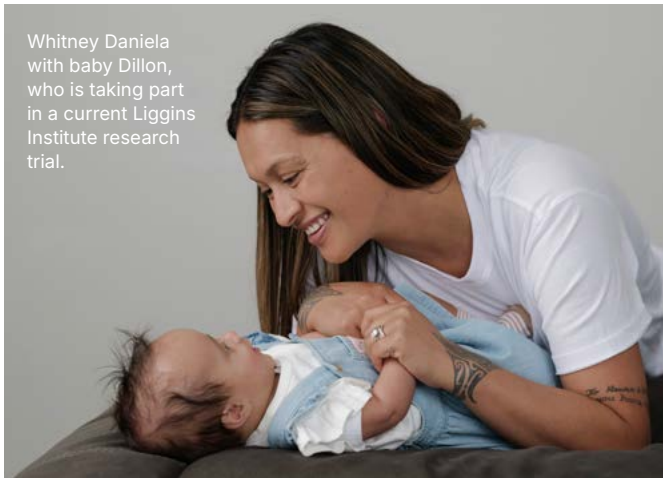
Liggins Institute director Professor Justin O'Sullivan says the campaign builds on a legacy of scientists, clinicians, patients, families, communities and donors working together.

The institute's landmark achievements include research that led to steroids being given to women at risk of preterm birth, boosting lung development in their babies, and the 'sugar babies' study, which showed that oral dextrose gel can reduce the risk of brain damage in newborns with dangerously low blood sugar.

"These and other developments have revolutionised pregnancy and neonatal care," says Justin. "But this campaign is about taking discoveries further – from the laboratory to families and into clinical practice. The treatments we develop matter because they can change the course of a person's life." ■

TO DONATE:
tinyurl.com/liggins-institute-campaign

You can read more about the Liggins Institute and its future as it turns 25, from page ten.



Whitney Daniela with baby Dillon, who is taking part in a current Liggins Institute research trial.



Professor Penny Brothers
PHOTO: ROYAL SOCIETY TE APĀRANGI

Chemist Penny Brothers to head Royal Society

Professor Penny Brothers, an honorary academic with the University's School of Chemical Sciences, will serve as president of the Royal Society Te Apārangi from July next year.

The inorganic chemist's long links to the University began with her study for her BSc and MSc. After completing a PhD at Stanford, she returned to the University to be an academic in the School of Chemical Sciences from 1988 until 2019.

"Now that I have stepped back from my full-time academic career, I wish to draw on my accumulated skills and experience to contribute to the causes that are important to me," she says.

"The interweaving of scholarship, education and engagement are critical foundations to increase public understanding of science and research in these troubled times."

Penny's enduring links to the University of Auckland also include many family ties. Her father Nick was a professor of geology, her brother Pete a dean of engineering, her husband David Ware a fellow chemist, and her children Hayley Ware and Tristan Ware are engineering graduates.

Her mother, Margaret Brothers, graduated with science degrees, worked in the Philson Library at the medical school, and when she died last year, aged 100, was among the University's oldest alumni at the time. ■

FULL STORY:
auckland.ac.nz/rsnz-penny-brothers

Origin stories



The Liggins Institute was born to explore how early-life events influence long-term health. Lesley Springall explores how the institute's findings have since translated into clinical practices that have saved hundreds of thousands of babies' lives globally and improved health outcomes for many more. And, 25 years on, we ask: what's next?

Distinguished Professor Dame Jane Harding's unassuming office at the University of Auckland's Liggins Institute bears little evidence that she is one of the world's foremost experts on pregnant mums and their babies.

Her groundbreaking work has significantly reduced the risks of brain damage for newborn babies with low blood sugar levels. It has also proved the safety and effectiveness of steroid injections given to mums to boost their babies' lungs before birth – a treatment that has saved hundreds of thousands of preterm babies worldwide from death or disability.

Tucked away on a shelf in her office, however, is a framed photo that provides a clue to the origins of this internationally significant work. Taken 25 years ago, it features Dame Jane standing between two other giants of New Zealand science: fellow clinical professor Sir Peter Gluckman, who became the Liggins Institute's first director, and Sir Graham Collingwood

(Mont) Liggins, who made history with his discoveries about how to treat premature babies, and after whom the institute is named.

These three researchers provided a critical foundation for the world-leading work of the institute today.

Big research in a small country

Dame Jane once described the founding of the Liggins Institute as a "bold experiment" to foster big, globally significant research from a small country.

And the experiment worked. The institute brought together internationally recognised scientists from a wide range of disciplines with a singular aim: to research the links between early-life events and later health risks, and to use that research to improve outcomes for babies and children.

It's a focus exemplified by the breakthrough 2013 'sugar babies' research, carried out by Dame Jane and colleagues, which showed through a clinical trial that rubbing a blob of an inexpensive sugar gel inside the cheek of babies with low blood sugar in the first 48 hours after birth rapidly improved their sugar levels, thus reducing their risk of brain damage. The treatment, which is now first-line care around the world, also reduced the need for these babies to be admitted to neonatal intensive care units.

The institute's 'big research' saves lives – and reduces healthcare costs.

A quarter of a century after its inception, the Liggins Institute has more than 150 staff, including 35 PhD students, six professors and two associate professors. It publishes close to 150 papers a year in peer-reviewed journals and has 214 living postgraduate research alumni, many working as clinicians in hospitals across New Zealand and abroad.

"One thing we all have in common as humans is that we were born," says professor of genomics Justin O'Sullivan, who has been the Liggins Institute director since 2023. "So, at the Liggins Institute, we focus on that event: the impacts of things that modify birth and that make the outcomes of birth better.

"The challenges that relate to that event change all the time and they're not easy to solve. And that's the beauty of it: the challenges are constant."

One example, he says, is the institute's newborn genomics programme, which uses DNA sequencing to identify rare disorders in very sick newborns.

"We sequence the baby and their mum and dad, and then we identify the genetic changes that are contributing to a baby being in intensive care," explains Justin. "The goal is to help clinicians quickly identify the condition that the child has, and how to treat or otherwise care for that child."

Since Liggins bought two genomic sequencing machines in 2023, it has been able to map the DNA of more than 60 newborns and their parents.



Professor Dame Jane Harding, pictured with Dr Anthony Walters and his daughter at the Liggins Institute.

In a project that started in March, Justin and his team are now working alongside doctors at Starship Children's Hospital to fast track development of new treatments for individual children with rare diseases after they have been diagnosed using the genetic sequencing technology. The team has received a $5 million anonymous philanthropic donation to carry out the work over five years.

"Through our clinical trials, our newborn genomics projects, our ongoing work on the best way to feed preterm babies [see 'Food for life', p15], research around AI in healthcare, and all our other research, the Liggins Institute has made massive contributions to human health," says Justin.

"There is so much that we are doing now – and that is still to be done."



What makes us what we are?

The hypothesis that events or conditions in a person's early development could influence their risk of disease in adult life is known as the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease or DOHaD. Developed by English physician and epidemiologist Professor David Barker in the 1980s

A family's story

Whitney Daniela always wanted a big family. Her mum is one of 12; she grew up surrounded by aunties, uncles and cousins.

She assumed building her own whānau would be easy; it seemed her body had other ideas.

Tragically, her first baby was stillborn, her second pregnancy ended in a miscarriage, and Whitney's pregnancy with her eldest daughter, now nine-year-old Jordan, started going seriously wrong at 24 weeks – a time when a baby's survival hangs in the balance. Two weeks of supervised bed rest got her through to 26 weeks, when Jordan was born.

The new family went through tough times, including eight weeks with Jordan in Starship's neonatal intensive care unit, and difficulties during subsequent pregnancies.

You'd never know it to witness life today at the Auckland home of Whitney, husband Danny and their daughters Jordan, Marlee (6) and new baby Dillon.

"Life with three girls is a crazy thing for every parent, but my life with three 'miracle' babies is something I always dreamed of," says Whitney. "My journey was different with each daughter, and each outcome is definitely different. But having my girls healthy and thriving is nothing but a miracle."

Front and centre throughout this journey, says Whitney, is Professor Katie Groom – obstetrician, researcher and passionate advocate for better knowledge and care around preterm birth.

Katie is a senior clinician at Auckland City Hospital, researcher at the Liggins Institute, and founding member of the Carosika Collaborative, which is hosted at the institute and works to provide the best outcomes for babies at risk of preterm birth or born preterm with a focus on equity for all whānau.

Katie was the doctor who led the Auckland team guiding Whitney through the crucial extra two weeks of pregnancy after 24 weeks – enough time for Daniela to receive steroid injections that would boost baby Jordan's lungs in utero. She subsequently helped Whitney and Danny through two more high-risk, but ultimately successful pregnancies.

And in her role as a professor, Katie gave Whitney and Danny a sense of the importance of research to improve preterm birth outcomes for future babies and their families; all their daughters have been involved in Liggins Institute research studies.

"It feels like we are making a difference," says Whitney. "Women just don't know about preterm birth – it isn't talked about in Māori and Pacific families. Some people don't have access to doctors.

"I want people to know preterm birth can happen, and that it's okay. It's not so scary once you get there, and there are things you can do and that doctors can do to make it better." ■ **Nikki Mandow**

and ’90s, DOHaD made connections between low birth weight, for example, and coronary artery disease, hypertension, obesity and insulin resistance in adults.

Sir Peter Gluckman once said the Liggins Institute was founded to ask perhaps the most important question in medicine: What makes us what we are? The institute’s research, he noted, “will determine how the next generation grows to be healthy and more resilient both biologically, intellectually and even in social terms”.

When it came to naming the institute, Sir Peter approached Mont Liggins, famed for his pioneering work in the late ’60s and ’70s into the birth process and the discovery that giving steroids to women at risk of preterm birth accelerated fetal lung development – and often saved their babies’ lives.

“Mont represented the kind of research I felt the institute should have,” said Sir Peter. “Namely high-quality basic science that had the capacity to be translated to make a difference.”

Left Tui and Whaiāipo Clarke, and their clinician at Starship Dr Chia Huan Ng, who have been part of the institute’s newborn genomics programme.

Below All three of Whitney and Danny Daniela’s daughters have been part of Liggins research programmes, including their youngest, Dillon.



Dame Jane later undertook studies involving the first cohort of babies whose mothers had received the antenatal corticosteroid injections. She and her team looked at the long-term effects of the steroids on the health of the now-adult babies 20, 30 and 50 years down the track.

The research consistently demonstrated the steroids were safe, and the published papers provided the reassurance doctors around the world needed.

“One of the reasons steroids were not taken up as quickly as they should have was people were worried there might be adverse effects in the long term,” says Dame Jane. “We were able to use that data to answer those questions.”

Clinician researchers

Professor of paediatric endocrinology Wayne Cutfield joined the Liggins Institute in its early days, attracted by the opportunity as a paediatrician and academic to focus on research with potential to change outcomes for patients, and to collaborate with researchers across disciplines.

“It created collaborations that would otherwise never have happened,” says Wayne, who served as the institute’s director from 2009 to 2015. “We can achieve so much more by bringing disciplines together than if they worked separately.”

Wayne points to the institute’s research into the gut microbiome, which has included looking at the role gut bugs play in the development and treatment of conditions including a gut-infecting bacterium called *Clostridium difficile*, obesity, autism, anxiety and anorexia nervosa. His interest in the area was first piqued more than a dozen years ago, leading to an initial study, working with Justin, looking at the development of the microbiome in children born prematurely.

“Justin and I hadn’t worked side by side before, but we got on like a house on fire. We were like the odd couple – a paediatric endocrinologist and a molecular microbiologist. You couldn’t think of two fields further apart – but we’ve become a very effective and powerful team because we’ve got this balance of basic science and clinical insight.”

“Having my girls healthy and thriving is nothing but a miracle.”

– WHITNEY DANIELA



“There is so much that we are doing now – and that is still to be done.”

– PROFESSOR JUSTIN O’SULLIVAN, LIGGINS INSTITUTE DIRECTOR

Gut bugs have become a major area of research for the institute, leading to internationally significant findings.

One groundbreaking study, carried out nine years ago, involved 87 obese adolescents receiving a faecal transfer (taking ‘good’ gut bacteria from healthy donors and giving them, in capsule form, to people with a less healthy microbiome) to see if it would make a difference to their health and weight.

A follow-up study, the results of which were published last year, found the original overweight teens who received that single transfer had a reduced risk for a range of metabolic changes that can lead to heart disease, stroke and diabetes, compared with participants who received a placebo.

The hunt is now on to identify which bacteria among thousands are most effective for the treatment of specific conditions, including metabolic syndrome and anxiety. The aim is to then scale up production of those ‘good’ bacteria to create super probiotics as treatments.

From ‘steroid baby’ to Liggins researcher

To encourage more clinicians to consider research, the Liggins Institute established its Clinical Research Internships programme in 2019, open to second- and third-year medical students.

In an extraordinary coincidence, one of the programme’s first two interns was Dr Gordon Liu, a twin born healthy at about 32 weeks after his mum was treated with Mont Liggins’ revolutionary steroid treatment.

Gordon, who is now a registrar at Auckland City Hospital, says he didn’t know anything about his mum’s experience with the treatment until he told her he was taking up the internship.

The opportunity was incredibly valuable, he says, teaching him the basics of research: conceptualising questions; data collection, cleaning and analysis; publication and presentation. It’s also led to his continued interest in research.

“In clinical practice the big thing now is obviously evidence-based medicine and trying to make sure that our care remains up to date, in line with published research,” says Gordon. “So, an initiative like the Liggins Institute Clinical Research Internships, where the focus is on conducting clinical research, is directly applicable to what we do in practice.” ■



Liggins Institute Professors Justin O'Sullivan (left) and Wayne Cutfield (right).
PHOTO: SIMON YOUNG

Food for life

You'll often find Professor Frank Bloomfield hiding out in a corner of the Liggins Institute on a Friday. It's so he can get stuck into the research he still loves.

A former director of the institute, Frank is now the University's deputy vice-chancellor for research and innovation; for much of 2026 he was also interim vice-chancellor.

Despite these big roles, Frank is still active in the research area that has consumed much of his working life – optimising nutrition for preterm babies.

In August 2025, he and his team received $5 million in funding from the Health Research Council to continue this work.

The goal is to save lives, reduce disability and enable our tiniest infants to go on to live healthier lives.

Ongoing clinical trials include looking into different intravenous feeds and milk supplements, and whether giving babies a drop or two of milk beside their nose and on their tongue before and during a tube feed can improve their developmental outcomes later in life. (Spoiler alert: it looks like it can.)

Frank and his team are also looking at 'refeeding syndrome'. Fifteen years ago, researchers discovered preterm babies could be impacted by the disturbing phenomenon whereby giving the wrong quantity and type of food to previously starved people can harm or even kill them.

Follow-up Liggins Institute research on refeeding syndrome in infants has helped shape new guidelines to support more consistent and safer nutrition for preterm babies across Aotearoa New Zealand. ■

Nikki Mandow

Wayne is now leading the OAK Study, which is treating toddlers prescribed antibiotics with a type of complex sugars found in human breast milk. Antibiotics have a negative effect on the fragile early gut ecosystem, and the study aims to see if these sugars protect toddlers' developing gut microbiomes and prevent them from later developing obesity, asthma and eczema.

Like many of the institute's researchers, Wayne is a practising clinician. He says clinical connectedness has helped recruit a range of experts to work on the microbiome research, and it also gives him crucial insights into the issues faced by patients.

Dr Ben Albert, a consultant paediatrician at Starship and a Liggins Institute senior research fellow, is another whose work in the field influences his research and vice versa.

Currently he's researching the role a father's obesity plays in the health outcomes of his children, given recent international research showing how a father's lifestyle can significantly alter epigenetic markers in his sperm.

He says practising as a doctor allows him to help people directly, while being a researcher allows him to work on longer-term projects that have potential to more widely impact clinical practice.

"Liggins champions the idea that early-life factors matter in adulthood, so if we can find effective treatments in early life, they could ultimately prove really cost effective and important," says Ben.

"We have a narrow window of opportunity, but it has such potential to improve the health of our society overall." ■

How to write and eat



GAVIN STRAWHAN
Gavin Strawhan is one of New Zealand's most experienced screenwriters. The Master of Creative Writing alumnus has also published two novels: *The Call* and *Slash*.

In 2024, after my first novel was published and I was absorbed in a masters in creative writing, friends and ex-colleagues would ask if I'd left television for good. My standard reply was, I think television has left me. Okay, not a terrifically funny joke, but Freud wrote a whole book about humour without ever raising a giggle, so bear with me. There's an old comedy writer formula to the effect that 'truth plus pain equals comedy'.

To unpack my feeble joke, the 'truth': shortly after Covid (when I was writing that first novel), I stopped getting offers of work. Any offers. To put that in context, for the previous 35 years I'd worked consistently here and overseas as a screenwriter, showrunner, executive producer and script editor.

It wasn't all smooth financial sailing. Scriptwriting, at least for me, was strangely seasonal, due in part to the NZ On Air funding model. Every year around October, the work dried up. It became a running joke between me and my accountant. I'd say, that's it, I'm a fraud, I've been found out. But my writing partner and I would toss around ideas, pitch to producers and broadcasters, we'd get a call, and would be busy, busy until the next year, when the anxiety would start all over. The freelancer's lot, but something always turned up.

Something always turned up. Until it didn't.

Until it didn't, around the time I got a SuperGold card. But because I'd been reasonably successful – oh, double-edged sword – it meant I didn't have other strings to my bow. In my twenties, I'd been involved in community circus. Elderly clown, anyone? I've never been a teacher or worked in hospo; never had a handy back-up skill for tough times. So, that's the 'truth' part of the equation. My services were no longer required. On to the pain.

Unlike the lonely pursuit of the novelist, television writing is collaborative. Over the years I've worked with many writers and directors, and created projects employing hundreds of actors and crew. I've stayed in touch with a precious few, some my closest friends. But the nature of the telly beast is that you work intensely on a project for a few months, share incredible highs and lows, then move on. Your social life is inseparable from the job.

And here's where the pain kicks in. I ask myself, did the work stop because I'm suddenly irrelevant? Is it simple ageism, or am I not a very nice person? The Buddha said we are each the dwelling place of our own old age, so perhaps this is the house I've constructed for myself.

There is also financial pain. I was incredibly fortunate when my first book won the Allen & Unwin fiction prize. I believe I have a good deal with my publisher, but television and books are from different financial planets. In the two-plus years since *The Call* was published, I've earned less from it than I would from a single, one-hour television script. It took me roughly four years to write the two novels I've had published; it used to take three weeks to write one hour of television. But if I hadn't managed to pivot into a late-life career change, if my publisher hadn't continued to be so supportive, it would be much harder to get up in the mornings.

I was chatting recently to an established, successful (younger) poet and novelist, whose last book was a real success, great reviews, excellent sales. He's never been more broke in his life. There used to be a living in teaching writing, he said, but that's dried up too, with the cost of living, latest government cuts, indifference to the arts, etcetera. Life was too short to waste it filling out unsuccessful grant applications to Creative New Zealand. The only glimmer of hope was that his book had been optioned. If it could only be made into a film or TV series.

I hate to finish on a negative note, so here's a suggestion. Ireland recently introduced a living wage for credited artists. That will probably never happen here, the user-pays neo-con myth is too entrenched. What we do have is New Zealand Superannuation. It's nowhere near a living wage, but without those fortnightly deposits, I don't know what I'd eat (and occasionally drink) while I'm spending another two increasingly precious years on my next book.

Perhaps that's our funding model: sacrifice the first 65 years gathering experiences and stories and topping up KiwiSaver, to spend the final stretch creating to our hearts' content.

**Footnote:* I received a call last week from a German producer. He asked if I'd be interested in a television project. Part of me wanted to say, I've left television. The sensible part said yes. ■

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

Taking on Taylor



Academic and 'Swiftie' Maxine Lewis wears her Taylor Swift scarf, which references the singer's hit 'All Too Well'.
PHOTO: SIMON YOUNG

Taylor Swift's lyrics find echo in classic tales, academic Maxine Lewis tells Julianne Evans.

The classics are having a moment. Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* is a box-office hit and singers from Beyoncé to Hozier are referencing classical mythology.

Then there's Taylor Swift, who tends to translate myths into contemporary personal stories, as she does in 'Cassandra' (*The Tortured Poets Department*, 2024), co-written and produced with Aaron Dessner.

A self-confessed 'Swiftie', Dr Maxine Lewis, a senior lecturer in classics and ancient history, has a long-time fascination with the mythological Cassandra.

"She's a really interesting figure because she speaks in public, she's visible, but she's also completely ignored, and she's often portrayed as being mad – although she's always right in the end," says Maxine, who also leads the University's gender studies programme and is a musician.

A recap: Cassandra was a Trojan princess who received the gift of prophecy from the god Apollo, but after she rejected his romantic advances, he cursed her so that no one would ever believe her. Consequently, her fellow Trojans dismissed her predictions about the Trojan Horse, which led to the sack of Troy. She was later claimed as a war prize by the Greek king Agamemnon and taken to Mycenae. Although she clearly foresaw their fate, her warnings were again ignored, and she was murdered, alongside the king, by the king's vengeful wife Clytemnestra and her lover.

Listening to Swift's take on this story in her song, Maxine had the idea to connect several things in one article: Cassandra the myth, Swift's version, and her own expertise in classics and gender.

"I started to go back into all these other versions of Cassandra and different ways that people have portrayed her and other supposed mad women. A lot of Swift's songs already deal with this idea of women who have been disbelieved while they were actually correct, and who experienced sexism and were treated as witches."

In 'Cassandra', Swift controversially suggests her prophecies were believed, says Maxine, but people just didn't want to deal with them and so they killed her because she knew the truth.

So, did Swift misunderstand the original myth or was this deliberate?

"Songwriters can make mistakes, but it might have been a deliberate intervention, and she's changing an aspect of the story. If so, what does that mean for her song?"

In an article published in *Classical Receptions Journal*, Maxine argues that Swift has consciously transformed Cassandra's story to highlight how society can punish female truth-tellers.

Swift positions herself as a woman songwriter, and this helped Maxine fit her into the lineage of female poets – from Sappho and Erinna to New Zealand poet Anna Jackson – that the academic teaches.

In the past five years, academia has woken up to the cultural phenomenon of Swift, who Maxine says now has a recognisable body of scholarship devoted to her.

"Swift didn't attract very much scholarly attention for at least the first ten years of her career, partly because of sexism in the music industry."

For example, prominent online American music magazine *Pitchfork* didn't deem any of her albums worthy of review until Ryan Adams covered *1989*, although it chose to review his version of the album, not Swift's.

Tellingly, Maxine notes that the first journal issue anywhere dedicated to Swift had the subtitle 'Taking Taylor seriously', and that was in 2021.

Maxine's own Swift scholarship is now moving to a potentially bigger project. She's gone through "every word of every song and every music video, cataloguing every Swiftian reference to sex, gender and sexism" – something she believes she's the first to do. The result, 'Taylor Swift, Gender, and Feminism: What Do the Data Say?', appears in *The Manuscript: Journal of Taylor Swift Studies*.

Maxine says her research on Swift is the perfect confluence of her own musical interests, and her focus on gender and sexuality in history and literature.

"But 'Cassandra' really gave me an excuse to completely immerse myself."

For links to the research, visit
auckland.ac.nz/lewis-swift



Dr Alison Talmage has written a handbook for others wanting to start a therapeutic choir. PHOTO: SIMON YOUNG

The healing power of song

FULL STORY:
auckland.ac.nz/therapeutic-choirs

Some people living with brain conditions – from stroke and traumatic brain injury to Parkinson's or dementia – can struggle to talk, making life harder and potentially isolating.

Dr Alison Talmage, MNZM co-founded a choir at the University's Centre for Brain Research in 2009, uncovering how singing can unlock benefits that support recovery, connection and well-being.

The music therapist says members of the CeleBRation Choir, which she co-leads, sing together weekly for fun, friendship and to work on their communication. The choir includes people aged from their twenties to their nineties, with warm-ups, exercises and the song repertoire tailored to the group.

The success of this approach inspired Alison's PhD research, which investigated what makes therapeutic choirs work and how they can be established and sustained.

Imprisonment's impacts on children

A new study is investigating what happens to tamariki and rangatahi before and after a parent or primary caregiver is sent to prison, and whether their rights and interests are adequately considered when courts make bail and sentencing decisions.

Previous research highlights a stark difference between what happens when mothers and fathers are imprisoned: when fathers are imprisoned, 79 percent of children continue living with their mothers and their living arrangements don't change. When mothers are imprisoned, most children's care arrangements change, with only 21 percent remaining with their fathers.

Funded by the Borrin Foundation, the project brings together academics from the University of Auckland and Auckland University of Technology, and from a range of disciplines.



"If a child's parent goes to prison, it may mean the person who's most invested in them loses all capacity to care for them or to monitor the quality of their care and their well-being for a period of time," says one of the study's researchers, Professor Julia Tolmie.

Auckland Law School Professor Julia Tolmie is among those involved with the study.

FULL STORY:
auckland.ac.nz/children-sentencing-study



'Kina barrens' are the target of new engineering innovation.
PHOTO: PAUL CAIGER

Robots to battle kina?

Dense swarms of kina (sea urchins) now cover a third of the Hauraki Gulf's rocky reefs, stripping away kelp forests that are foundational to coastal biodiversity.

Diver-based culling – where divers manually crush kina directly on the seabed – can restore kelp within two years, but it's labour-intensive and difficult to scale.

However, a new Next Foundation-funded project led by the University's Faculty of Engineering and Design is bringing together engineers, marine scientists and divers to tackle this challenge by developing robotic solutions.

The project will develop technologies across four interconnected areas: improving diver-operated tools, developing semi-automated removal systems, enhancing underwater ecological monitoring, and investigating future robotic solutions for large-scale restoration.

Associate Professor Andrew McDaid, who will lead the first two workstreams, says: "There is a real opportunity to use mechanical engineering and robotics to make sea urchin removal faster, more effective and scalable."

FULL STORY:
auckland.ac.nz/kina-barren-innovation



Vaping concern in infant deaths

University of Auckland and Otago researchers have published a study that has found a link between maternal vaping and Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI).

Smoking during pregnancy by mothers and sharing the bed with their baby are recognised as major risk factors for SUDI, especially when they occur together. In New Zealand, smoking in pregnancy has decreased, but SUDI rates remain the same.

A recent study of a series of 101 SUDI deaths in New Zealand during 2022 and 2023 had detailed information about maternal nicotine exposure and the infant's sleep environment for 66 cases.

Findings showed that smoking and/or vaping was reported in nearly three-quarters of these cases, while nearly 70 percent of infants had died while directly bed sharing. Maternal vaping was reported in half of the SUDI cases involving direct bed sharing. This compared with one in five cases where direct bed sharing was not reported.

"The interaction between maternal smoking and bed sharing is well established," says the study's lead author, University of Auckland's Professor Ed Mitchell.

"What is new and concerning is that vaping may be showing a similar pattern of risk as smoking, especially when combined with bed sharing. This raises the possibility that the effects of nicotine itself, rather than how nicotine is delivered, may be contributing to infant vulnerability."

FULL STORY:
auckland.ac.nz/maternal-vaping-sudi

Loving the ride

Entrepreneur Kate Gatfield-Jeffries talks to Megan Fowlie about the meteoric rise of wellness brand Moodi.



When *Ingenio* meets Kate Gatfield-Jeffries in a shared office space above Ponsonby Road, she is poised, crisp, well contained, fizzing on the inside – the epitome of the front-facing founder.

Kate recently featured on the *Forbes* 30 under 30 Asia list for her role in driving her company's meteoric rise through retail and e-commerce channels.

Moodi, co-founded with Nick Ward, champions women-centric supplements, sodas and protein snacks and claims a lion's share of the trans-Tasman wellness market. The team is targeting an early 2027 direct launch of Moodi's products to North American consumers.

But that challenge is already dwarfed by a greater audacious goal. By 2030, Kate wants Moodi to be the biggest women's wellness brand in the Western world.

"I am very ambitious," says Kate.

"Deep down, I love the thrill. I continue to push because I don't want to be sitting in one place for too long. I am relentless. I'm intense. I push the boundaries.

"I never feel comfortable in my job. Everything evolves so quickly ... the business is unrecognisable every six months."

She gives a wry smile. It is a discomfort that the 28-year-old creates for herself and there's a sense that the speed of change at Moodi is theme-park addictive. This is her first ride, her first full-time job.

"There are huge pivots, learning and leading the beast," she says.

“I am relentless. I’m intense. I push the boundaries.”

But the entrepreneur has tossed out the rule book on experience. “When you don’t have a framework of what you like in a manager, going in blind can be good. You just create your own idea of it.”

Kate says in the early stages of Moodi she sought little external input. “Many decisions were just instinctive; a lot, in hindsight, were the right decisions.”

Arguably, Kate’s intuitive calls rest on solid theoretical foundations. She graduated with her conjoint Bachelor of Laws and Commerce degree the same year Moodi incorporated. And, for at least a decade, she has consumed the rules of business and the trajectories of people who made them and broke them, reading business tomes, founder autobiographies, podcasts and self-help books.

On top of that, her father Mark, a University alumnus, is a serial founder.

Kate describes herself in her early years as “a conscientious eldest child and a big rule follower, never a risk taker”. The entrepreneurial fervour grew in stages, propelled by three defining experiences.

The first came as an “unfit and asthmatic” child struggling through cross country at Wentworth College.

“You know what, I don’t like coming last. I thought, I’m going to beat those kids. I trained and trained, and I did.”

She placed third, despite being the youngest in her age bracket. Kate became her own living proof that fierce ambition coupled with sustained effort was the recipe for success.

At university she channelled her ambition and effort into creating a CV of great grades and leadership positions. She also sought out scholarships and internships, ticking the unwritten checklist for top-tier graduate consulting roles. Then, while summer interning at PwC, Kate met fellow high-flying student Caterina Barton.

Caterina recalls the pair bonding over entrepreneurship, championing women in business and a mutual love of vegan food. Kate recalls Caterina cajoling her into the 1,000-word Ideas Challenge – an entry stage of the University’s Velocity $100k Challenge.

“As plant-based food enthusiasts,” says Caterina, “we identified a market gap for plant-based baby formula, sized the market, pitched a business model and outlined the resources needed to develop the idea.”

Kate witnessed the transformative power of an idea transposed succinctly on to paper. This key moment, Kate says, shifted her immediate consulting path to entrepreneurship.

Caterina was to be influential in other ways. When the EY Corporate Finance Woman of the Year competition came around in 2020, Caterina encouraged Kate to enter.

“I had competed the year before and I was confident Kate had what it took. She knocked it out of the park, going on to win the global title – the first time a New Zealander had won the worldwide competition,” she says.

“What struck me was that Kate hadn’t formally studied finance, yet threw herself into it as a quick learner, thoroughly prepared and open-minded about the challenge. It showed she could excel at virtually anything she set her mind to.”

Caterina joined McKinsey & Company in 2021, where she also crossed paths with Nick Ward. Later that year, Nick and Kate entered the next $100k Challenge with “a fairly formed idea”. That was Moodi.

Kate’s next eureka moment was sparked during her co-presidency of the student-led Women in Business club – a role she considers her most entrepreneurial prior to Moodi. Equipped with ambition, effort and a formula for a convincing pitch, Kate secured funds from professional services firms and learnt to incentivise a team of volunteers.

“With the budget to create excitement, I discovered the power of marketing. We were the hottest, freshest club to be a part of and, by default, everyone wanted to sponsor us.”

Fast forward four years and Kate describes how Moodi entered supermarket chains and gained premium shelf space using the same vortex of excitement.

“It’s an open secret: e-commerce,” says Kate.

“I built a really big business online, then went to the retailer with an easy sales pitch. ‘I have all these women wanting this great product. I think they want to buy it from you.’”

Kate hailed a victory when demand for Moodi pre and probiotic soda outstripped supply. The exhilaration continued with a big-ticket Range Rover giveaway and the lure of golden tickets in protein balls – a promotion smacking of Roald Dahl’s mysterious and eccentric Willy Wonka.

Midway through writing this, I make my own dash for sustenance. A trolley stacked with partly unpacked Moodi soda cartons is in a prime position at the entrance of the local retail store. It is out of place – far from the refrigerated shelving where Moodi drinks have horizontal and eye-level status and nowhere near the stock chiller. I can’t help thinking the serendipitous late-lunch display could be a very clever marketing tactic that interrupts the retail playbook.

Through the exhilaration, Kate says she never loses sight of her ultimate mission, which is to give back to women in business. She stays connected with the University as an annual guest speaker for Professor Christine Woods’ Women in Entrepreneurship course and has welcomed ten paid student interns to share the wild climb of Moodi’s start-up phase. ■

Facing the future



What will a successful leader look like in a future facing a changing climate, increasing social and political division and technological change? Owen Poland asks established and emerging leaders for their takes.

Like the tip of an arrow, the term 'leader' implies the person out front, heading the charge and setting the course for others to follow.

But Dan Te Whenua Walker (Ngāti Ruanui, Ngāruahine, Ngāti Kahungunu o Te Wairoa, Maniapoto, Tūhourangi) uses another metaphor: "Leadership is about weaving people together around a shared outcome. You're not there to be the boss of people; you're creating the conditions for them to contribute and lead."

As a teenager, Dan left school feeling lost and disconnected. But after spending time with his nana 'Chick' on a Taranaki marae, he learnt about the extraordinary feats of his tūpuna and felt a renewed pride in being Māori.

"That experience shaped my purpose: to help people who, like me, may not yet see a future for themselves or feel connected to the present," he says.

After several retail roles, including serving as Dick Smith's youngest store manager, Dan was an executive at Microsoft. He has since founded Te Whare o Toitū AI, a kaupapa Māori AI firm, and holds several governance roles, including Child Cancer Foundation chair.

Along the way, he completed an MBA at the University of Auckland. He is now undertaking doctoral research into the economy of mana, a concept developed by the late Dr Mānuka Hēnare, drawing on the experience of building his own business.

Dan says humility, courage and integrity are central to his leadership style. "I see leadership as service: creating space for others to discover their own leadership journey. One of my strengths is lifting people up and helping them thrive."

Setting a clear direction is important, he says, but so is knowing when to step back and let go. A top-down model, in which leaders are expected to have all the answers, isn't a fit for our complex future.

"Rather than trying to have all the answers, leaders need to ask better questions and create the conditions for others to find solutions."

Above Dan Te Whenua Walker says a complex future requires leaders who encourage others to ask questions and find solutions, not just provide all the answers themselves.

The leader's paradox

We're certainly facing a complex and uncertain future, influenced by the rise of fast-moving technologies like social media and AI; changing geopolitical orders and instability; and climate change.

Within this context, the biggest challenge leaders now face, says Professor Brigid Carroll, is dealing with paradox.

Brigid, who holds the University's Fletcher Building Employee Educational Trust Chair in Leadership and is director of the Aotearoa Centre for Leadership and Governance, says today's leaders are constantly required to balance approaches that are simply not compatible. A common example is needing to weigh short-term and long-term needs, but there are many others. An organisation needs to perform and hit its performance targets, for instance, but it also needs to be resilient and sustainable and not burn out its people.

"The strategy with paradox is essentially to not collapse the paradox; to not swing one way or the other, but to keep moving while keeping hold of these contradictions."

Not collapsing the paradox requires leaders to find compromises and trade-offs, but to also acknowledge they will never be able to please everyone and reach complete consensus.

It's a constant juggle, which is requiring leaders to manage change in a new way.

"We're shifting from a 'project' view of change, which is discrete – it has a beginning and an end – to viewing change as perpetual and ongoing. It never goes away and it certainly doesn't have a start or an end line."

Facing complex challenges and on a treadmill of change, people tend to seek out 'saviour leaders', who offer simple, clear-cut 'solutions', says Brigid, but leaders who can actually manage complexity look very different. Like Dan, she notes a key characteristic is their ability to bring others into the tent to source solutions.

"They prize relationships, have empathy and compassion. They understand that change takes time and that as you build, you will need to redirect and reroute. People continually want the white knight who says, 'I'll save you from this', but more complexity-oriented leaders say, 'We need to save ourselves' and create space for people to participate in that."

Don't go it alone

Beatrice Faumuinā, CNZM OLY also believes successful leadership thrives in an ecosystem of support.

"Leadership is never in isolation," says the recently appointed director of the University's Kupe Leadership Scholarship programme.

The programme provides a transformational personal development opportunity for students who care deeply about New Zealand and want to create a brighter future. It includes one-on-one mentoring with respected leaders in a scholar's respective field.

Kupe scholars "should never ever make those big decisions on their own or feel that they're on their own. And if they do, they know they can pick up the phone and reconnect with us," says Beatrice.

"The hope is that when they think about Kupe and their ongoing journey, we've built that confidence and deep relationships, not only for now, but also for the long-term."

The Olympian and former diplomat has benefited from scholarships throughout her life, and says the programme aims to encourage "lifelong learners", nurture career paths, and introduce scholars to an ecosystem that wants them to succeed.

Mentors have also played an important role for Beatrice, who says having someone like the late Les Mills, CNZM MBE to open doors and challenge her thinking helped her see possibilities that she could otherwise never have imagined.

"He was not just a coach in sport; look at what he did for business, what he did for community. There were so many different avenues of expertise that I could lean on, and listen to that wonderful voice of reason."

Recognising that burnout is a major challenge for leaders, Beatrice says her sporting career taught her about the importance of rest and recovery.

"Your greatest learning will always be when you're resting and recovering, when you're taking time away to actually give back to yourself so you can recharge to therefore go again."

Looking ahead, she says leaders will still need to be very ambitious, but sustainable leadership will be about being smarter and more collaborative.

"I think they will be more culturally intelligent and aware than possibly we were. And hopefully, with technology and people power, it will still be people at the end of the day who will benefit from this leadership model. That's what I hope to see."



Right A sporting career taught Beatrice Faumuinā the importance of rest and recovery to combat burnout.
PHOTO: CHRIS LOUFTE



Left Short-term thinking is failing us, says Meg de Ronde. PHOTO: NGAHUIA ORMSBY

Below Strong cultural foundations give leaders courage, says Nathan Chong-Nee. PHOTO: STEVE MONTGOMERY, PROFILE PHOTOS

Create a long-term vision – and stick to it

Meg de Ronde was a curious, talkative and assertive child, used to having robust conversations in a politically aware family. In part, this gave her the confidence to step up into leadership roles when she was asked.

"I grew up in a family that was aware of dynamics in society and, as a result, was politically active, did care about injustice, inequality, things like that," says Meg. "I have always been interested in doing work that helps make Aotearoa and people's lives better."

During her University of Auckland masters in political studies, and after her graduation, Meg was head tutor and a contract lecturer before becoming the first woman, and the youngest person, to lead Amnesty International in New Zealand.

In her current role as chief executive of the Human Rights Commission, she leads in a shared Tino Rangatiratanga-Kāwanatanga leadership model with a co-equal Māori CEO, to reflect the partnership between Māori and the Crown.

"I'm not tied to particular manifestations of what leadership should look like, or what power should look like. I think there's strength in collaboration. I think there's strength in high-trust relationships."

Post-Covid, leaders need to recognise that "nothing is certain anymore", says Meg, and adapt quickly to manage uncertainty without full sets of information.

New Zealand also urgently needs leaders who understand the failure of short-term thinking around public transport, ageing populations, education systems and health.

"These are complex issues, they're complex structures, and they need people willing to outline a long-term vision and then stick to it."

She's proud of the commission's 'Honour the Promise' public awareness campaign calling for the government to act on the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

"I think it is beholden on all of us to keep pushing for that longer-term vision of New Zealand."



Grounded to be courageous

In his role as chief executive of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, Nathan Chong-Nee says one of his biggest challenges is to hold another of those paradoxes – hope and honesty.

He also draws on his Māori and Pacific heritage to find solutions that give those affected a voice at the table.

"In Sāmoa we talk about *le vā* – the sacred relational space that exists between people. So, how can we create spaces where we are bringing forward voices and experiences to come up with solutions that resonate with the people who need the solutions."

Having graduated from the University with a Postgraduate Certificate in Health Sciences and a Master of Social Work, Nathan was recognised in the University's 2025 40 Under 40 list for outstanding alumni making a meaningful difference in their field and community.

Being part of the Young Pacific Leaders and Obama Asia-Pacific Leaders initiatives also provided life-changing opportunities to journey with a cohort of amazing people.

"Having that network of people that I trust, who I can celebrate with because they're doing the most incredible things – I think they changed my career significantly."

For Nathan, the opportunity to lead comes down to the trust of other people, and he's constantly thinking about how to honour those who've allowed him to hold positions of influence.

"I'm always learning how to be a leader and how to be the best leader, and I don't think it's a destination that you ever arrive at. If anyone says that, they've got some magical secret."

As for future leaders, Nathan says they'll need strong

"An 80 percent solution on time is better than 100 percent down the track."

– RICH ADAMS

foundations to succeed in an uncertain world. "We need strong and courageous leaders who know who they are, what their whakapapa is, and what's at their foundation; being grounded enough in order to be courageous is critical."

Courage has been a cornerstone of the career that Rich Adams has forged in the military, and in emergency management. "I've tried, wherever possible, to undertake leadership roles where there's a tangible result," he says.

Having graduated from the University of Auckland with an arts degree in ancient history, Rich joined the British Army and studied military and strategic leadership at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the UK, where the motto is 'Serve to Lead'.

"Leadership is a privilege not a right. And when you are undertaking a leadership function, your main goal is to enable those you are leading, and servant leadership is the best way to do that."

During a six-year stint in the British Army, Rich spent seven months serving in Afghanistan and says it became "a core part of who I was". And it was the chaotic evacuation in 2021 that inspired his formation of the veteran-led Taskforce Kiwi.

"How do I use my skill and experience from that time to have something to point to and say I've actually made a positive difference, as opposed to something that was a failure?"

A lot of people want to help when disaster strikes, but Rich says there needs to be an element of leadership to corral people into a more organised unit with a clear mission and the resources and support required.

"That aspect of leadership in emergency management and disaster relief is key. Just enabling people to do it and to provide that support as effectively as possible."

A 2025 Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year semi-finalist, Rich says that while leaders tend to focus on consensus building, there's also a need for more decisive leadership.

"The amount of time they've got to make decisions feels like it's becoming shorter," he says, "and an 80 percent solution on time is better than 100 percent down the track."

Uniting a community

While spending her formative years in Malaysia, 2026 Kupe scholar Wei Tian Teo saw how those living in rural regions of the country had limited access to healthcare resources. However, she was always reminded by her "worldly and wise" parents about the struggles others face.

That's why she calls her life in New Zealand privileged, because she doesn't have to worry about working a second job to put food on the table.

"I can use this privilege to donate towards helping somebody else who might not be able to have the same resources."

Wei Tian has always been drawn to leadership roles – she was head girl at Auckland's Macleans College and a founder of her local UN Youth chapter – but says her leadership views have changed since joining the Kupe programme.

"I think the future of leadership really stands in being able to unite a community and get them to care about one specific cause. And it doesn't have to be one person at the helm doing all the work."

Getting to meet other scholars doing postgraduate education has created a valuable sense of community, and she's grateful to have Health New Zealand's Waitematā chief medical officer, Dr Laura Chapman, as her mentor.

"The mentorship side has revealed to me that my leadership isn't confined to just the medicine sector. I'm not restricted to just being a doctor. There's also so much I can do in terms of policy and advocacy and it has really broadened my horizons."

The focus of Wei Tian's honours research is the development of an open source digital representation of the human body that will be more culturally appropriate and accessible than dissecting cadavers. However, she thinks that her future could lie in the politics of medicine.

"I'd very much like to become someone who can really get a group of people to care about a cause and have that pass through in ways that are actionable for the country – or for the world." ■



Above Effective leaders unite a community around a cause, says current Kupe scholar Wei Tian Teo.
PHOTO: CHRIS LOUFTE

Making sense of the world

Jonathan Good tells Lesley Springall how he's drawing on wide-ranging experiences to help pioneer a world-first 'digital nose'.



A dog is probably what comes to mind when we think of a creature with a supercharged sense of smell. But insects also have this superpower and their receptors' sensitivity to microscopic volatile organic compounds (VOCs) – to forage for food, avoid predators and find mates – is 1,000 times greater than a dog's.

Mimicking this super-smelling ability is what Auckland-based company Scentian Bio is doing, with its creation of an AI-powered 'digital nose'. By mounting synthetic insect scent receptors on microchips, the company aims to provide low-cost, handheld sensors that can quickly assess and monitor VOCs across a range of applications, from food quality and disease detection to biosecurity.

"Smell is our fastest, most foundational sense," says Scentian Bio's CEO, alumnus Jonathan Good. "It's the only one wired directly into our limbic system to alert us to danger, changes and disease. So there's a huge breadth of contexts in which having that sense could transform how we work."

The company's unique biological approach mimics nature's highly evolved scent receptors, allowing AI to interpret signals with a level of sensitivity and precision that standard electronic noses simply can't match, says Jonathan. The initial target market for this technology is the global US$8 billion food and beverage quality control industry, with commercial pilot projects now nearing completion with seven global food firms.

"They all have the same fundamental problem: people want more natural ingredients, but nature is inherently variable," explains Jonathan.

"Companies receive truck after truck of raw ingredients, but they don't know the quality, so they're sending millions of samples to labs. That's not only hugely expensive, but the information can take days to come back, which is not good for perishable food. That's why the world is full of write-offs and recalls, because the information speed doesn't match the supply chain."

The company's sensors can deliver chemical information in real time, he says, allowing decisions to be made immediately rather than days later.

Early results and the technology's promise have attracted strong investor support, with the company closing an oversubscribed $7 million funding round in April, led by Icehouse Ventures. The investment will help scale manufacturing in New Zealand, expand engineering and customer support teams, and continue developing applications in medical diagnostics and biosecurity.

The technology's potential for many applications is one of the reasons Icehouse Ventures backed the company, says Icehouse principal Bex Gidall. It's also difficult to replicate, is attracting significant global customer interest, and has potential "to deliver laboratory-quality accuracy in minutes, even in complex real-world samples rather than just controlled laboratory conditions", says Bex.

The beginnings

Jonathan says leading the start-up feels like a natural culmination of his skills and experiences – drawing on everything from his successful exit from a previous start-up to handling a botulism crisis at Fonterra.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GABRIEL GOMES



Left Jonathan Good (right) in the lab with Scentian Bio chief scientific officer and fellow alumnus Colm Carraher.

Right A sample being tested on the company's chip, which works as a 'digital nose'.

A common thread throughout his career has been a fascination with how things work.

"I've always been curious about the world and loved problem solving, which I guess was the driving force for studying physics and maths," he says. "Then I realised studying economics added a whole different level to that."

After graduating from the University of Auckland with a conjoint Bachelor of Science and Arts (Hons) degree, Jonathan joined McKinsey & Company in Auckland before heading to the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. His Oxford masters thesis, 'The incentive for a dominant firm to innovate', earned him the prize for the best overall performance by a graduate economics student in 2006. But academia wasn't where he saw his future.

Itching to get back to business, he returned to McKinsey, this time in New York, where he specialised in technology, media and telecommunications.

"I mostly loved it, but there was always that frustration of being the consultant and not the person who's actually implementing and delivering outcomes."

That frustration pushed him and two friends to move to San Franciso to start their own venture. Called 1000memories, it was a tech platform that helped people preserve, organise and share family photographs and stories.

"We had a list of what we thought were really good ideas and what became 1000memories was towards the top of that list, but it wasn't the thing that we quit our jobs thinking we'd do; we were just bold enough to give it a shot."

Backed by start-up accelerator Y Combinator, the trio successfully secured venture capital funding before the company was acquired and its tech absorbed by the genealogy company Ancestry.com.

On the scent

Wanting to return to Auckland, but unsure of what to do next, Jonathan accepted an offer from Fonterra to "bring some entrepreneurial thinking" into the organisation, resulting in him leading its $400 million retail business. Stints at T&G Global (Turners & Growers), Transpower and Auckland Airport followed.

However, the start-up itch persisted, leading him to become a mentor at Sprout Agritech, which helps accelerate growth and investment in early-stage agritech and food-tech companies. It was during a Sprout pitch session that Jonathan met Dr Andrew Králíček, the founder of Scentian Bio.

"The tech was amazing, especially in terms of building something that can really change how everyone on the planet experiences life."

Head of molecular sensing at Plant & Food Research (now part of the Bioeconomy Science Institute), Andrew had spent two decades working out how to harness insects' sense of smell to create highly sensitive synthetic biosensors. In 2019, when Andrew met the Sprout team, he'd just filed patents capturing the technology he'd developed.

"From that first pitch, it just joined a whole series of different dots in my mind," recalls Jonathan. "The tech was amazing, especially in terms of building something that can really change how everyone on the planet experiences life."

Initially as a mentor, then board member, Jonathan helped spin the company out from Plant & Food and raise $3.5 million in seed funding, plus $2.7 million from the Gates Foundation to accelerate breath-based malaria detection. In 2023, he became the company's full-time CEO to help accelerate its transition from research to commercialisation.

Building that capability has highlighted the depth of talent in New Zealand, says Jonathan.

"We have quite a few University of Auckland alumni on the team. We're doing something very specific and multidisciplinary, so it's great to be able to recruit amazing, world-class talent in Auckland."

His focus is now on building supply reliability and manufacturing capability as the company transitions to regular commercial shipments – first to the companies involved in the pilots and then further afield – which should happen by the end of this year, he says.

But monitoring food quality is just the beginning. Imagine a smartwatch that, equipped with Scentian's technology, analyses your sweat for nutritional health or early signs of disease, says Jonathan.

"We see the opportunity as vastly different to the scale we have now. Look at what's happening with AI in robotics – all these things would be enhanced by real-time chemical information.

"We look at ourselves ultimately as a chip company. We want to provide smell chips in the same way other people sell LiDAR cameras or Nvidia sells GPUs, enabling other people to build the applications. The possibilities are very exciting." ■

End of the golden weather?

Our weather is changing. Donna Chisholm asks what this means for the classic Kiwi summer.



Cultural historian and alumnus Richard Wolfe fears the impacts of climate change on Kiwi summer holiday traditions are only just beginning.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS LOUFTE



For as long as most of us can remember, the enduring symbols of the Kiwi summer have been beaches, barbies and jandals.

But the impact of climate change means the peak holiday season is now more aligned with buckets, bailing out of campgrounds and generators.

In January, the deadly landslide at Mount Maunganui, which killed six holidaymakers, proved just how seriously we must all take that threat.

We won't be changing the weather any time soon, so should we be altering our holiday habits instead?

Climate expert Dr Kevin Trenberth, an honorary academic in the University of Auckland's physics department and a distinguished scholar at the National Center of Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado, believes that might be a sensible move.

"Normal summer holidays are at the wrong time anyway. The most settled month is normally February, so by tying the holidays to Christmas, it limits the prospects."

Kevin, who shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for his contributions to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, says the El Niño and La Niña cycles are increasingly impacting our mid-summers.

It brings wetter weather in La Niña years, such as early 2023, but mostly drier weather in El Niño. The latter can even include droughts. (Drought and wildfire are major risks for our neighbours in Australia in El Niño conditions.)

During La Niña there is a greater risk of atmospheric rivers and heavy rainfalls. Recent examples include the Auckland Anniversary weekend floods and Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023. But in El Niño, the risk is of drier conditions and local drought in the North Island.

They're not happening more often, Kevin says, but the consequences are greater.

Currently, a major El Niño event is looming and expected to peak over the coming summer, bringing the likelihood of wetter weather in the south and west, and drier in the north and east.

In addition, over the past ten to 15 years, climate change has made the so-called atmospheric rivers coming from the tropics more powerful, penetrating further into New Zealand, causing heavier and more extensive rain, flooding and erosion.

The best we can do is plan for heavy rains and flooding. "On your own property, make sure you've got good drainage systems and if you're living in a coastal region, then you might want to move. But the main thing is to try to build resilience for these effects and then maybe you can even take advantage of them – you can save the water for a dry period."

While he believes some school holiday dates are chosen "rather weirdly", the idea of shifting them comes with "a few buts".

"If you're a relatively young kid, maybe you want to go to the beach and enjoy the sunshine, but if you're older, maybe not. As you get older, you probably want to avoid the extremes at both ends."

Cultural historian Richard Wolfe, a University of Auckland Bachelor of Fine Arts alumnus, agrees. Richard has written extensively on New Zealand's cultural identity and in 1993 co-authored *At the Beach – the Great New Zealand Holiday* with Stephen Barnett.

At the Beach documented the adaptation of the British love of the seaside to New Zealand conditions, taking in such local features as volcanic black sand, lilos, togs and the humble bach. His latest book, *The Passing of the Forest,* is a visual history of the devastations humans have wrought on native forests, one of the natural protectors against the effects of climate change.

Richard grew up in New Plymouth and says the beaches fringing the Taranaki Bight were a major summer attraction.

"Those of us who grew up in the '50s and '60s spent our summer holidays lying on the sandhills, cooling off in the Tasman, along with TT2s and ice creams that cost four pence. It may be selective memory, but Christmas summer holidays back then seemed interminably long, and the sun was invariably shining."

Increasing awareness of the risk of melanoma has changed some of that. "I don't think any of our generation sit around in the sun like we used to for several reasons, one of which is the sun seems to be fiercer than ever."

"People who might reliably go to a specific campground or do a specific activity at a certain time of the year have to rethink."

– DR CLAIRE BEACH, BUSINESS SCHOOL

He says climate change also represents a threat to the traditional Kiwi bach, the down-home versions of which are slowly being replaced by models worthy of *Grand Designs*.

Ironically, Richard and his wife Pamela, a renowned artist and illustrator, have missed all but one of the last 30-odd Kiwi summers, opting to spend the time with their UK-based daughter. But he's not in favour of shifting our traditional holiday period to February or March.

"I suspect there can be no guarantee that the weather in February would be better, and therefore more suitable for the nation's summer holiday. I fear that if we, and the world at large, continue to drill and burn fossil fuels, we ain't seen nothing yet."

Shifting the long school summer holiday into February, when the weather is – currently – often more settled, has been a bubbling debate for years. While it would mean kids might get more 'summer' in their summer holiday, some in the debate also argue that, as temperatures rise, it would offer students and teachers respite from the stuffiest month in the classroom.

The same logic applies to workers, of course, but doubly so for parents with school-aged children, who need to provide supervision when kids are not in school. But what are the options if we work for a business that has a summer shutdown?

What's likely to happen now, says Dr Deepika Jindal, a professional teaching fellow in management and international business at the University, is what she calls "leave crafting". This is how employees can proactively shape when and how they take leave to support their well-being, life-role and career outcomes. It's



Climate variability may increase workers' demands for flexibility, says Dr Deepika Jindal.

the same logic that applies to the established concept of job-crafting – Deepika's research area – in which employees can adjust their tasks and relationships at work to better meet their needs.

Deepika says leave-crafting in response to summer weather might include employers offering a shorter compulsory closedown, with the rest of the period converted to flexible leave that employees can bank and take when they choose. Other options could be staggered shutdown windows so not every employee is locked into the same period, and for employers to ask what they want from their break, rather than making assumptions based on traditions.

It isn't a one-size-fits-all solution, though, with larger organisations more able to offer such flexibility.

"What's changing isn't simply the weather – it's the value proposition of leave," says Deepika. "If a summer break no longer reliably delivers the experiences people associate with it, employees may place greater value on being able to choose when they use their leave. In that sense, climate variability may increase demand for flexibility rather than necessarily increasing demand for more leave."

It's part of an economic conundrum that tourism businesses are already grappling with, says postdoctoral research fellow Dr Claire Beach, from the University's Business School. Her PhD research focused on how tourism firms become more sustainable and are now developing "nature-positive tourism".

She says the changing weather patterns make it harder for both firms and consumers to plan their trips. "People who might reliably go to a specific campground or do a specific activity at a certain time of the year have to rethink."

Claire's research in 2024 collected data from 13 tourism firms (seven tour operators and six accommodation providers) that indicated tour operators – such as ski-field businesses and those running chartered excursions, such as whale and dolphin-watching – were more impacted by the changing weather patterns than accommodation providers.

Cyclones that wash trees and debris into the water constitute another hazard in summer, while changing water temperatures mean whales and dolphins are staying further from shore because it's now as warm there as it used to be closer in. That means trips to see them will take longer, reducing the number of daily trips operators can run.

Choppier weather patterns also mean choppier seas, which can force trips to be cancelled for safety reasons. Another downside is that choppier seas can make the customer experience far less enjoyable.

She says marine tourism firms are being forced to change their thinking about the products they offer.

"Usually, they'll just sell a ticket and go out two or three times a day; now they're thinking, 'Well, we have this boat that's sitting empty all the other hours of the day – what can we do with it?' So, private charters are becoming more of a thing."

These charters would be scheduled at times the business usually did not operate. Likewise, ski-field operators without snow at the opening of the season might switch to offering hiking or mountain biking.

Of course, climate change affects more than our physical environment – it also impacts our mental well-being, says Faculty of Science research fellow Dr Phillipa Pehi. Phillipa is a member of the New Zealand Psychological Society's Climate Psychology Taskforce and for the past two years has been the society's director of environmental issues. It's a position that was created in response to the increasing need for psychological help for 'environmental distress' because of climate change. This mental distress includes anxiety, PTSD, depression, rage and hopelessness.

Work is under way to develop therapies to specifically address climate distress, which affects people both directly and indirectly. "We are seeing more people, particularly youth, experiencing distress at what they see happening in our world."

In September, Phillipa set off from Kapowairua (Spirits Bay in the Far North), on a planned six-month hīkoi to traverse the length of New Zealand – a walk she has completed four times since 2013. She wants to find and share inspiring stories of hope and resilience within communities and the environment.

However, she believes most of us are denied our connection with nature due to factors such as busy lifestyles, lack of resources and restricted access.

"When I was young, I was happiest when I was in nature by myself or camping outdoors with whānau because nature's so loving and accepting. You don't have to look a certain way or be a certain way or mind what you say or quieten down or behave.

"One of the main reasons that propels me to keep doing this work is that I am filled with such sadness that my mokopuna may not get to experience the same thing if we don't manage as humanity to change our mentality towards nature." ■



TIPS ... to use AI – without outsourcing your thinking

Trained on enormous amounts of data, AI systems that many of us regularly interact with, such as ChatGPT, Copilot and Gemini, are becoming increasingly powerful. But like any technology, AI is a tool – not a substitute for human reasoning. Dr Jesin James, of the Faculty of Engineering and Design, offers tips on how we can think about and use AI in helpful ways.



DR JESIN JAMES
is a senior lecturer in electrical, computer and software engineering in the Faculty of Engineering and Design.

1 Learn what AI is doing

Let's start by taking a step back. Before using AI, take a moment to understand how it works. AI doesn't 'think' like a human; it learns patterns from data and uses those patterns to make its best guess. Understanding this helps you use AI critically. (And you can learn how to do this with the help of AI! See Tip 3.)

2 Think about the impact of data

Before diving in, think about that data. This can be anything from text, speech and images to spending habits, traffic patterns, medical scans or even your coffee orders. AI is only as good as the data it learns from. When using AI, consider whether it has access to enough relevant, high-quality data for the purpose you're using it for. Also, think about the broader impacts of collecting and processing that data, including privacy, ethics, bias and the energy required to power AI systems.

3 Learn something new

Got that? Okay, let's dive in. AI is great for learning something new, whether that's a language, musical instrument or programming language. You can use AI to suggest resources, create practice exercises and quiz you. The resources should be based on research and from experts, but AI can be that tireless mate who is always available to explain, quiz and practise if you are prepared to question its responses.

4 Cut through paperwork

Nobody enjoys filling out forms, summarising meetings, searching policies or rewriting an email. AI can handle much of this repetitive work, leaving you more time for work that needs your attention and creativity. Just like data is more than text, AI applications are more than just chatbots, so it pays to see what applications are available for your specific needs.

5 Embrace your second pair of eyes

AI can help spot things that are easy to miss, whether it's an error in a document, a fault in a product or something unusual in an image. Adding complexity to this, AI can identify faults in manufacturing and even assist with disease screening. Of course, humans can do this too, but AI can help us focus our attention on what must be done with these observations and how to respond to them.

6 Make information more accessible

Access to information should not depend on the language you speak, your hearing ability, or where you were born. You can use AI tools for real-time translation when travelling, automatic captions during meetings and lectures, or live transcription when following a conversation. This is not just about convenience. When more people can access information, express their ideas, and participate fully, the playing field becomes fairer. However, language carries nuance and cultural context that AI can sometimes miss. Human expertise remains essential for accuracy and context.

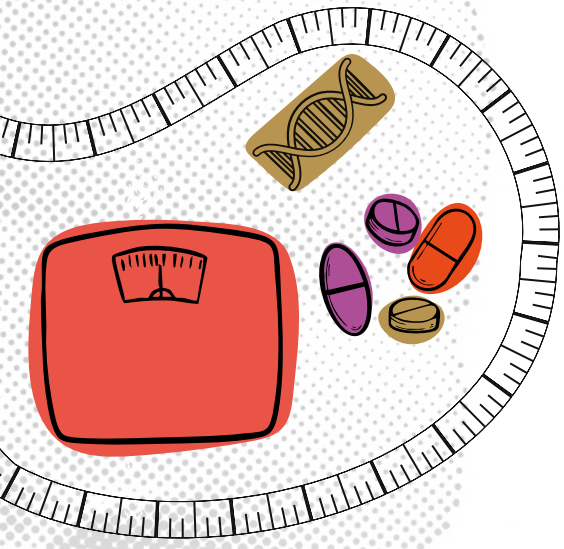
7 Waste less

A lot of commentary about AI focuses on the energy it uses, but the technology can also help us use our resources more efficiently. AI can be especially useful for identifying opportunities to reduce energy consumption and reducing food waste by reminding us to use food before it expires and planning meals around ingredients we already have. Sometimes, the most valuable role of AI is not to help us consume more, but to manage the everyday details that help us waste less and make better use of what we already have. ■

Taking issue

Are GLP-1s the answer to our obesity epidemic?

As the obesity epidemic rolls on, new generation, GLP-1 weight-loss medications are generating big buzz and debate. But are they the answer?



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



Richard Edlin

Where will the funding come from?

Around 1.5 million adults and 175,000 children in New Zealand are obese, which increases the likelihood of them developing health problems. People living with obesity face discrimination within the health system, while obesity-related conditions have a disproportionate impact on Māori and Pacific peoples. Social, commercial and structural determinants drive these issues, with obesity and overweight costing the New Zealand health system about $2 billion a year.

Against this background comes the development of GLP-1 receptor agonists that help some people lose weight. Pharmac has placed one such weight-loss medicine, Wegovy, on its Options for Investment list without any guarantee of funding now or in the future. If funded, Wegovy is likely to require significant investment.

Pharmac allocates New Zealand's pharmaceutical budget and spent $1.8 billion in 2025/26. How much extra money will be required? Under conservative assumptions, including restrictive qualifying conditions (a BMI greater than 40 and two-plus obesity-related conditions), Wegovy is likely to cost above $300 million every year for adults alone, even after Pharmac negotiates price reductions. Wegovy might not be the first candidate funded with an increased pharmaceutical budget, so obtaining Wegovy may require a bigger budget still.

Where might funding come from? In the short term, Wegovy won't substantially reduce the current costs of obesity, as obtaining access depends on people already having developed obesity-related conditions and few people with obesity would qualify for treatment. Wegovy is likely to instead require trade-offs, with cuts elsewhere in the health system to accommodate access to weight-loss drugs.

Swiss physician and alchemist Paracelsus observed that 'the dose makes the poison'. International evidence, especially from the UK, suggests that higher spending on newer medicines (especially in oncology and immunology) reduces population health overall. Here, increased pharmaceutical spending displaces more efficient activities elsewhere in the system.

New Zealand seems to be in a similar situation overall. Calls to increase the pharmaceutical budget tend to ignore the potential for toxicity. Rather than spending on pharmaceuticals, a better approach may be to address the broader reasons underlying health problems, and invest where medicine tends to be most cost effective, especially in primary care.

Health economist Richard Edlin is an associate professor of health systems in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences.



Marion Roberts

An eating-disorder perspective

The so-called 'obesity epidemic' receives significant attention, and with good intentions: improving the health and quality of life of the population.

However, a simplistic focus on modifying body size, shape or weight in the name of health risks overlooking the many determinants of health that exist independent of body size, while reinforcing society's often-subconscious weight stigma.

In my clinical work supporting people with eating disorders, we increasingly see clients who have been offered or prescribed GLP-1 drugs as a 'solution', with little consideration of the broader psychosocial factors driving body-related distress.

While emerging evidence supports the use of GLP-1s for medical conditions such as diabetes, there is currently little empirical evidence to guide their use in those with eating-disorder symptoms. Safety data specific to eating disorders remains limited.

The allure of a drug-based solution is completely understandable. A legitimate and safe role for GLP-1s in some people with disordered eating who live in larger bodies may be emerging, particularly in the context of binge-eating symptoms.

However, there is a risk that blanket prescribing practices in the absence of contextual screening or assessment could contribute to the onset, maintenance, escalation or relapse of eating-disorder symptoms.

These drugs also present clinical challenges. Eating-disorder treatment for some presentations often involves rebuilding interoceptive awareness of hunger or fullness cues, while GLP-1s pharmacologically alter these same signals.

What is our goal when considering GLP-1 drugs for weight loss alone? Are we using thinness as a proxy for health? Do we expect biologically quieting 'food noise' to sustainably improve psychological well-being? Or do these medications risk becoming a surface approach where broader, more considered intervention is required for long-term well-being?

As health professionals we must remain aware that weight alone is a poor indicator of health, and it is unrealistic to expect all bodies to conform to a size or shape society labels as 'healthy'.

From an eating-disorder perspective, meaningful intervention requires compassionately understanding and addressing an individual's broader biopsychosocial context and relationship with food.

Eating disorders are rarely just about food and body size. My hope is that we will strive to see the whole person in the room, not just the size of their body.

Dr Marion Roberts is a senior lecturer specialising in eating disorders in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, and principal clinical psychologist at Nurture Psychology.



Ben Albert

A game changer for severe childhood obesity

New Zealand is facing a major crisis: obesity in our children and young people. Anyone with obesity is at significant risk of serious health problems: diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, osteoarthritis, heart, liver and kidney disease.

But it's worse in children.

My colleagues and I are seeing a frightening rise in the numbers of children and teenagers in our type 2 diabetes clinics; virtually all are significantly overweight.

These young people are staring down the barrel of a life of serious, chronic disease. Type 2 diabetes is particularly aggressive in children and teenagers. They develop complications (from eye damage and kidney failure to heart attacks and stroke) much earlier and much faster, medications have less effect, and they die younger than their peers.

The human cost is enormous, as is the cost (and future cost) to our health system.

Moreover, the young people with type 2 diabetes are just the tip of a much larger iceberg. One in eight Kiwi children aged two to 14 years is now classified as obese. In paediatrics, we see children as young as ten who weigh more than 100kg, often gaining weight at an alarming rate. Dietary and lifestyle advice almost never makes a difference for these young people.

Wegovy is approved by New Zealand regulatory body Medsafe for children aged 12 and over. But it isn't funded by Pharmac and can cost $400 a month or more.

Most of the young patients we see at Starship Hospital don't have the money to afford Wegovy.

But in the few who do, these medications can have dramatic effects. They are less hungry, less driven by food, they lose weight and feel better. Their risk of obesity-related health problems decreases.

There are unknowns – not least the long-term effects of such medications on young people, and whether they can ever successfully stop them. We worry about loss of muscle mass and the best ways to avoid it, but these concerns pale in comparison to the risk of uncontrolled obesity.

We urge Pharmac to look at funding Wegovy for children and teenagers with severe or complicated obesity.

Dr Ben Albert is a specialist paediatric endocrinologist and a senior research fellow at the Liggins Institute.

For other opinions on the subject see:
auckland.ac.nz/taking-issue-GLP-1s



Left Richard Lewer outside his studio in Northcote, Melbourne, 2026. Image by Christian Capurro, courtesy of {Suite} Gallery.

Right, below Richard Lewer, *Iluwanti Ken*, 2026, synthetic polyment paint on canvas, 1,980x1,980mm. Image by Christian Capurro, courtesy of {Suite} Gallery.

A keen eye

Rebekah White talks to Archibald Prize-winning artist Richard Lewer about his frank, funny and often challenging paintings.

After Richard Lewer decided to make a portrait of his friend, fellow artist Iluwanti Ken, he knew there were many things he needed to do before he could pick up a paintbrush. Go on a journey, for starters.

Though he'd known Ken for many years, he'd never seen her home. So he paid a visit to Country, spending a week on Ken's ancestral lands, six hours' drive from Alice Springs, where the heat hits 46 degrees.

He didn't paint then, either. He drank cups of tea, sat, chatted, steeped himself in the place. He saw Ken in her various roles: Pitjantjatjara elder, traditional healer, grandmother, mother, sister, arts organiser. He saw where she slept under the stars.

Richard wanted to paint the intensity of her spirit, of her land. The vibrant yellow ochre background he chose almost propels her out of the frame. She's bowed a little, but her head is upright.

"The weight on her shoulders is the weight of the family, of Country, of everything," he says. "She gets nagged every minute of the day, like, 'Oh, we need this, we need that, can you do this, can you do that', and it's kids and grandkids and family and then the arts community. She's got so much on her plate."

In May, Richard's painting won the 2026 Archibald Prize, Australia's most prestigious award for portraiture. It propelled both Richard and Ken into the spotlight – and while some wondered what right a white guy had to paint an Indigenous woman, and win a prize for it, those are exactly the conversations Richard wants to have.

Ken belongs in the spotlight, he says. Since the Archibald win, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation has commissioned a documentary about her.

Richard grew up in Hamilton, where his parents worked for the Inland Revenue Department. His sister would go on to become an accountant, but Richard was so bad at maths that his dad hired a tutor. Art classes at Hamilton Boys' High School involved painting a Roman sandal over and over again ("We wore them, so it was kind of an easy thing to take off when you wanted them") or copying paintings by van Gogh or Monet.

"There's something embedded in me that really likes endurance, and that idea of hard work," he says, "and I guess that's what I learned there. You're bored out of your skull painting a Roman sandal, but you have to keep on going."

At home, he painted whatever he wanted.
"It was my escapism. I was using art as a way to work out the world," he says. "I started painting family members, and then landscapes, and where I was. Not that I'd show those back at school, because that wasn't allowed. It was very strict."

When Richard moved to Auckland to attend Elam, he found it mindblowingly cosmopolitan. He didn't fit the art-student mould, with his jandals and home-made jersey, his tennis competitions and weekend surf trips. But he worked hard. "I mean, there's lots going on, working out who you are," he says.

His teachers were giants of New Zealand art: Robert Ellis, Don Binney, Jacqueline Fahey and Dick Frizzell. He's still in touch with Frizzell, his tutor; he'd politely ignore Frizzell's advice and go off and do his own thing.

"I needed that time to do what I needed to do," he says. "I responded to the whole environment in Auckland, and that experience."

Four years after graduating from Elam, Richard moved to Melbourne, where he's lived mostly since. There's more room in Australia for what he does – which is to make series of paintings that circle around a theme or question. Some are autobiographical: one series, called *Richard's Disasters*, includes a painting of himself being spotted by his students drunk at the pub on his first day as an art teacher at Ruapehu College. Another series features people's confessions, and included a live performance where Richard painted people's darkest secrets.

His paintings almost always feature recognisable things: construction workers building a new art gallery in Sydney, endangered birds, landscapes, redheads, sportspeople, words, scenes from history.

In her former role as New Zealand Portrait Gallery director, alumna Jaenine Parkinson curated an exhibition in 2024 featuring Richard's series *What They Didn't Teach Me at School*. She says artists who depict the real world, as opposed to painting abstract works, are often seen as less serious – at least in New Zealand's art tradition.

"He's kind of rare in that he is very candid," says Jaenine, who is now chief executive of Museums Aotearoa, "but also rare in that he deals with this subject matter that is not as popular."

Richard's work homes in on blind spots, taboos, awkwardnesses, things people would rather leave unsaid. "I think he can do that in a really disarming way," she says. "He's a real storyteller."

One of Richard's interests is history. Learning about the Waikato Wars for the first time – events that happened in familiar places – inspired *What They Didn't Teach Me at School* and the New Zealand Portrait Gallery exhibition provoked controversy and conversation: Whose stories are these? Who gets to investigate them?

It takes a lot of effort to make work this simple, this immediate. Richard's own vulnerability is a crucial ingredient, says Jaenine: his ignorance, his mistakes. "Like, this is not a polished, perfect reality," she says. "This has got the warts and all."

Nowadays, people keep asking Richard if the Archibald Prize has changed his life, and he'd like everyone to know that his day-to-day reality is just the same. But he might finally build a good painting studio out the back.

What he's most proud of is a work that's still unfolding through exhibitions, workshops and talks. It's called *Steve*: a series of paintings and an animated short film about one family reckoning with dementia. Richard created the paintings on Formica tabletops, focusing on the table as a gathering point where family memories are made and shared.

The film comprises thousands of his paintings; the exhibition, acquired by the National Gallery of Australia, has been travelling around Australia for three years, and it's still going.

"I've been to so many talks where people go, 'Oh, you know, my father's got this, my mother's got this'," he says. "I want to talk about things that we all have in common with each other, and to connect with that, and to tell those stories."

Richard Lewer's works can be viewed in New Zealand at Ponsonby's {Suite} Gallery. **suite.co.nz**





Finding faults

Research has identified that Auckland has a 'new' active fault. Anthony Doesburg asks the scientists behind the findings, should we be worried?

Above Hannah Martin was doing her masters in Earth sciences when she was part of the team that identified the Mangatangi Fault as active.

When it was revealed in May that New Zealand's biggest city had a previously unknown active fault, the news rumbled around the world.

A paper published in the *New Zealand Journal of Geology and Geophysics* detailed fieldwork, led by a former University of Auckland masters student in Earth sciences, which showed for the first time that a fault in south-east Auckland's Hūnua Ranges is alive and a genuine hazard.

The paper detailed how, using radiocarbon dating, the researchers identified that the 18km fracture, known as the Mangatangi Fault, has moved in the past 10,000 years. That's well inside the 125,000-year period in which any movement qualifies a fault as active.

However, Hannah Martin – that masters student who was also the paper's lead author – says there are no signs of imminent activity.

"This fault may not rupture again for tens of thousands of years," says Hannah, who is now doing a PhD in earthquake geology at the University of Nevada in the US.

Even so, she and her study advisers and co-authors – Auckland School of Environment senior lecturers Dr James Muirhead and Dr Jennifer Eccles, and Professor Mark Stirling of Otago University's geology department – warn the fault's quake potential should be taken seriously.

They write: "These results indicate that the Mangatangi Fault may pose greater seismic hazard to the Auckland area than previously considered, which, given high exposure and vulnerability, could translate into significant risk."

Living on shaky ground

The findings, which were under wraps between Hannah completing her masters in February 2024 and their May publication, are another indicator we're indeed living on 'the shaky isles'.

More than 20,000 earthquakes are detected in and around the country each year according to online encyclopaedia *Te Ara* – as many as 250 of them strong enough to be felt. Between 1840 and 2016, *Te Ara* notes that earthquakes caused 501 deaths directly or indirectly.

The most lethal of those, in Hannah's home province Hawke's Bay in 1931, killed 258 people. Christchurch's February 2011 magnitude 6.2 shake, thought to have been an aftershock of one the previous September, claimed 185 lives.

In the space of less than a month this year the country was shaken by two sizeable quakes: one of 5.9 magnitude centred near Te Anau and the other magnitude 5.7 near Taumarunui. Fortunately, neither resulted in casualties.

Hannah and her co-authors have calculated that a Mangatangi Fault rupture has the potential to be about 6.9 magnitude, equating to nearly five times the shaking and 11 times the energy of the fatal Christchurch quake. Not that the researchers are losing sleep over it.

"I believe we should not be worried about the things we can't control," says James, "and instead continually work towards building greater resilience to natural hazards in Tāmaki Makaurau by supporting science, education and policy."

Hannah is on the same page.

"I completely agree, but what we can control is how well prepared we are. All we can really do is try to understand as much as possible – things like how faults behave, how often they rupture, how much uncertainty there still is – so communities and decision makers have the best information available to reduce risk."

Studying Earth sciences offers a unique perspective of the world, says Jennifer.

"Thinking about how much the Earth changes over geological time makes you realise nothing is static or 'normal'."

New Zealand's seismic hyperactivity is down to friction between two pieces of the Earth's crust, the Pacific Plate and the Australian Plate, which are colliding beneath us.

"New Zealand is well known internationally as a 'natural geological laboratory'," says Jennifer, who supervises a number of postgraduate students who come to the country for that reason. "When it comes to active geological processes, we do seem to have most of them as we straddle a tectonic plate boundary and have built up expertise based on this."

Generating research with impact

The media interest in the paper, which received coverage everywhere from the *Franklin Times* to the *Guardian*, took Hannah by surprise.

"I keep telling people I think I've already peaked in my career with my first first-author paper making international news."

She began her study of the Mangatangi Fault aged 22 thinking she was merely engaged in adding to a database of existing fault measurements.

"I had no idea of the full impact it would end up having. That said, I already felt like I'd struck gold regardless of the outcome because I got to spend so much time outside collecting physical data, and my advisers were amazing."

She first came under Mark's tutelage while doing a BSc in geology at Otago University. "I had a lot of fun in my undergraduate independent geology project working with Mark, mapping the Taieri Ridge Fault in Otago.

"He showed me how to identify features of faulting in the landscape such as fault scarps and offset sediment and then sent me off to map half a range front on my own – just a small one!

"I had a blast hiking around, chatting to the local farmers and mapping the different geologic units and faulting features I found along the way."

Mark, a former principal scientist at GNS Science, has an ongoing role maintaining the National Seismic Hazard Model and expects the new finding on the Mangatangi Fault to make its way into the model.

Also looking to the future, James advocates for more investigation of the region's known faults and an ongoing search for others. "I think Auckland city would benefit from offshore fault studies in the Waitematā and Manukau harbours," he says.

He envisages this as part of a wider policy centred on improving resilience to natural hazards, as life on our shaky isles rumbles on. ■



Above James Muirhead hopes the new information about the fault will be used to increase resilience to natural hazards. PHOTO: CHRIS LOUFTE

Below The Mangatangi Fault, shown in red, runs alongside the Hūnua Ranges in south-east Auckland.



Out in the cold



Tauranga-based engineer Rochelle Kirby tells Janet McAllister about her moonlighting gig: guiding polar expeditions.

This is adventure with a capital A. When Rochelle Kirby is landing Arctic cruise tourists on Norway's Svalbard, she always carries a rifle. That's in case a polar bear comes close and hasn't already been put off by flares and noise deterrents.

"We maintain our vigil when guests are on the shore, scanning the perimeter, keeping watch," says Rochelle, when describing this aspect of her polar tour-guiding duties. "Bears can swim, so I'm often scouting in the Zodiac [boat]."

Between voyages, the team keep their skills sharp at local rifle ranges – but shooting would be a last resort. "If I see fresh tracks before the excursion, we won't land the guests."

Over her two Arctic seasons, she's seen polar bears feasting on a washed-up sperm whale; humpback whales trapping schools of fish using 'bubble nets'; and five blue whales swimming together alongside the cruise ship. On days at sea – between Norwegian islands, Greenland and Iceland – she gives lectures about the intelligence and physiology of Arctic birds.

It's literally almost an entire world away from Rochelle's usual life in Tauranga, where the 2019 engineering graduate works for Beca as a mechanical engineer, specialising in building services. She also volunteers as a Coastguard rescue crew member and a watch assistant onboard the *Spirit of New Zealand*.

But wait, there's more: thanks to her understanding bosses and flexible working arrangement, by the time you read this, Rochelle will be prepping to swap polar bears for penguins, to guide tourists in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic islands, for her second southern polar season.

In fact, some of Rochelle's favourite places are New Zealand's own sub-Antarctic Campbell Islands and Auckland Islands, which she describes as "the most beautiful, wild, intriguing places I've ever been" – in part due to their unique mega-herbs. The islands are where Rochelle got her first taste of cold summer adventures, thanks to a True Young Explorer scholarship with Heritage Expeditions in 2021. That experience also inspired her to pursue the qualifications in skippering and ornithology necessary for polar guiding.

The sea is the common element among all her lives. Rochelle grew up with boats in Auckland, and both sailing and engineering are in her heritage: her grandfather was in the Merchant Navy and her father was in the Royal New Zealand Navy. Now working as a marine slurry engineer, Rochelle's dad encouraged her to pursue engineering as it suited her skill set.

She studied mechanical engineering for its wide variety of career options, but the most useful skills she learned weren't always the technical ones. "The [engineering degree] course teaches you how to manage your time and manage your projects," she says. "It teaches you the principles, how to put the puzzle pieces together in whatever job you end up in; it teaches you teamwork. And the degree shows employers you've got a brain to solve reasonably complex problems."

Rochelle also successfully applied for the Dean's Leadership Programme, which enables a select cohort of undergraduates to hear from leaders in professional fields, support each other, and connect with potential internships.

These days she helps to design heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems for buildings such as hospitals and schools as well as for Tauranga's new civic precinct, Te Manawataki o Te Papa. She enjoys the variety and collegiality of her day job. "Our team are keen to share their knowledge with you, and I appreciate that."

Back in polar-guide mode, Rochelle's favourite animal is the northern rockhopper penguin, which sports impressive spiky yellow eyebrows. And her life goal is "trying to see all 18 species of penguin in their natural habitats. The guiding job is helpful for that … some species are extremely remote."

In the meantime, "I just want to keep learning," she says. "I take more risks and opportunities now than when I was younger. Each year you do something cool and you're like 'how am I going to top that?'"

If anyone can – it's Rochelle. ■

So much to be done

Engineer, entrepreneur and philanthropist are just some of the titles alumnus Robert Kee has held, learns Nikki Addison.



Being busy is a lifelong trend for Robert Kee. Since graduating from the University of Auckland in 1970, he has founded three companies, started a charity to mitigate poverty in developing countries, written five books, and opened a luxury hotel functioning as a social enterprise.

At 78, the Singaporean shows no signs of slowing down. He continues to work full-time – unpaid – as the executive chairman of his charity Operation Hope Foundation (OHF), and was recently acknowledged for his immense contributions with the *Straits Times* Singaporean of the Year 2025 International Impact Award.

But a career in charity wasn't always part of Robert's plan. Following his studies at the University, which he attended as a Colombo Plan scholar, he returned to Singapore and completed his masters. He spent the next two decades working in the private sector, finding success as an entrepreneur.

A trip to Cambodia in 1995 spurred him to change his focus. There he encountered true poverty first-hand: extreme hunger, inadequate housing and a lack of basic utilities like streetlights. Having donated to charities for several years, he grew wary about how his funds had been used, and felt he could make a more meaningful difference.

"In the beginning I was Santa Claus, giving away money," he says. "I realised that wouldn't solve the problem, so I decided to start my own NGO and run it properly."

Enter OHF, which he launched in 2001 at the age of 53. The charity supports poor communities in Cambodia and Nepal by building wells, toilets and houses, supporting students with school supplies and bimonthly food packs for their families, and providing employment for locals.

It also established and runs two children's homes, which provide total care – from enrichment programmes to proper nutrition. Robert stays in these homes during his regular visits to oversee OHF operations, and says it's always a highlight.

"It is wonderful when you wake up surrounded by 100 children. They call me 'grandfather' and they are very lively. Some have been there since they were eight and are now 18 – they are like your own family."

He wears another hat during these visits: magician. Having practised magic since age 12, he has a wealth of tricks up his sleeve – much to the children's delight.

"They love my magic tricks," he laughs. "When you play with kids, you bond with them."

In the 25 years since founding OHF, Robert has seen the impact of the charity's work. Families who once lived in shacks now have warm, dry homes; children who skipped school to work so their families could afford food are now able to complete their schooling; orphans and abandoned children who had nothing have left the children's homes and built careers.

"We are dealing with the poorest of the poor, so when we build people a house, for example, the impact is incredible. It is very moving when you see the difference you can make in people's lives."

Robert continues to think of innovative ways to benefit those less fortunate. He recently started a project converting organic waste into bio-organic fertiliser, which is given to farmers struggling with increases in the product's cost as a result of the US-Iran war. The initiative also helps to combat Cambodia's inadequate waste-disposal systems.

Next, he hopes to develop technology that supports locals with day-to-day tasks, such as an appropriate vessel for carrying goods on their hours-long walk to market and back.

Looking ahead, he says he intends to work for as long as possible. How can he step back when the mission is so important?

"I need to be there to fly the kite. Without tension, the kite falls down – I provide the tension," he explains. "As long as I am healthy, I will continue to do this. There is still so much to be done." ■

Above Children graduating this year from an OHF children's home present Robert with a thank-you gift.

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

Lesley Springall talks to alumni living in the US, Italy and Spain.







Amelia Butler

Los Angeles, US

When Amelia Butler (Ngātiwai, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Awa) spent six months in the US as an exchange student, it confirmed a long-held pull she'd felt to live on Turtle Island (one of the Indigenous names for North America).

So, a year after graduating from the University of Auckland with a conjoint Bachelor of Arts and Laws degree, she moved to Tongva territory (Los Angeles) to pursue a career in hip-hop dance. Nearly two decades later, however, she has another calling.

Amelia is the founder and director of Learn Māori Abroad, a global online and in-person community that teaches Māori language, culture and traditional performing arts to people living outside Aotearoa New Zealand. She also leads a Los Angeles-based kapa haka group, travels the US delivering kapa haka workshops and cultural experiences, and has taught at leading institutions including Yale, UCLA and the University of Hawai'i.

"Living on Turtle Island has opened doors I never imagined," she says. "From giving a TEDx talk on Māori culture to teaching haka to corporate organisations and universities across the continent."

"People want to connect to something traditional, authentic and real."

Amelia says majoring in Māori studies at University ultimately laid the foundation for her current career. "It gave me the knowledge and confidence to share our language and culture with others. And while I didn't end up practising law, my law degree has also given me credibility in different spaces."

She says there's a growing international interest in Māori culture. "I think it's because people want to connect to something traditional, authentic and real. They've been inspired by seeing haka online and want to try it, or they are looking for ways to heal from the impacts of colonisation and Western culture, as well as to reconnect with their own indigeneity."

Los Angeles is "incredibly creative and diverse, which I love", she says, but she remains connected to Waipapa Taumata Rau; she's completing a Master of Indigenous Studies online and is considering a doctorate.

She's also raising her children in the US and ensuring they grow up with a strong connection to their Māori identity.

"My 'why' has changed over the years. Now it's about my children, my ancestors and helping ensure our language and culture continue to flourish for generations to come."





Al Jeffery
Tuscany, Italy

Living in the Tuscan countryside near Siena, restoring his family's 16th-century villa, Al Jeffery likes to say he's "living within history, rather than merely looking at it".

Raised in Dunedin, Al completed a bachelors degree in mining engineering at the University of Auckland before earning a PhD at Imperial College London. He then moved into investment banking in London before moving again to Sydney to found financial services company Bluestone.

Like most start-ups, Bluestone faced early challenges. However, with a focus on financial services and lending technology, the business grew rapidly, prompting another move, back to the UK, to the group's new headquarters in Cambridge. But when Covid hit, Al and his family decided they wanted a slightly slower pace of life.

"Siena was particularly appealing because it's extraordinarily beautiful but slightly off the beaten track. Similar in size to Dunedin, it's small enough to be manageable for a family while remaining culturally rich and fascinating."

Siena moves at a gentler pace, where relationships, family and community tend to take precedence over efficiency. "Not everything is treated as a problem of optimisation here," he says.

Al is now chair of Bluestone and its financial technology subsidiary Fignum and says modern technology makes remote work straightforward. He still travels once or twice a month, mainly to the UK, but also to the US and Mexico following his 2025 investment in Wills Wing. The Californian hang-gliding brand manufactures gliders in Valle de Bravo, Mexico.

"Wills Wing was a fascinating opportunity to combine business, aeronautical engineering, manufacturing and a sport I've been passionate about for many years." He says it was also an opportunity to help rebuild and expand a historic business.

Al says he uses his engineering education almost every day. "Engineering teaches you to define a problem, break it into manageable components, identify the important variables, test possible solutions and keep going when the first answer fails. Those skills have been enormously valuable."

Al remains closely connected to the University, regularly attending alumni events and exploring opportunities to strengthen links with Wills Wing. "Last year I was lucky enough to be invited by the University to McLaren's manufacturing facility near London, a fascinating and memorable occasion."

Despite living in many different locations, Al says he's always retained what he sees as characteristics of a New Zealander – "curiosity, independence, an ambivalence to hierarchy and a willingness to give it a crack!"

James Blick
Madrid, Spain

When James Blick and his Spanish wife, Yoly, decided to move to Spain in 2011, it marked the beginning of a new chapter. Fifteen years later, the former lawyer and filmmaker has built two successful businesses and helped thousands of people discover and relocate to the country he now calls home.

The founder of Spain Revealed, an online education business helping people navigate the realities of moving to Spain, James uses online courses, videos and a YouTube channel (watched each month by more than half a million people) to help others build a new life in Spain.

It's a long way from the career he imagined while completing a conjoint Bachelor of Arts and Laws degree at the University of Auckland.

He practised law for a year after graduating but, realising it wasn't for him, joined the family's filmmaking business as a production assistant – "I made a lot of coffees," he laughs. He went on to direct a couple of award-winning short films but then decided to take a break and moved to France to teach English, where he met Yoly.

They returned to Auckland for a stint, but a future directing television commercials didn't appeal, so they moved to Madrid. Once there, he fell in love with the history, culture and food, but struggled to make ends meet as a travel and food writer, he says, so he co-founded Devour Tours. He grew it to become one of Europe's leading food-tour companies before selling it in 2021 to concentrate on Spain Revealed.

"My law degree taught me how to think clearly and explain complex issues simply. At the same time, my arts degree sparked a real love of history and writing. So, looking back, everything I've studied has found its way into what I do now."

That blend of interests continues to shape his life. "I love the culture around food here – sharing meals, gathering with friends and family – while raising our daughters in a bilingual, bicultural family is incredibly rewarding," he says.

He remains close to several University friends but misses New Zealand's lack of crowds and proximity to nature. That partly explains the family's recent move from central Madrid to Torrelodones, a small town north of Madrid in the foothills of the mountains.

"Right now, I simply want to dig in, keep growing Spain Revealed and enjoy this beautiful place with my wife and daughters."

A country life

Informed and inspired by her life and work as a Hokianga GP, Dr Clare Ward shares stories of being Pākehā in a Māori world. By Megan Fowlie



General practitioner Clare Ward has just taken a call. It's her publisher, telling her that her first book, *A Place to Stand: A Country Doctor's Life in Hokianga*, is being reprinted after being launched just six weeks earlier.

"Is that fast?" she asks. She's uncertain, but it's "very nice, affirming".

For now, Clare sees herself as a writer; the label of 'author' is so fresh, it's uneasy.

Clare's first career was in zoology. She completed a long stint of study in the subject at the University of Auckland, but part-way through her doctoral thesis on the metamorphosis of the wax moth, she switched to medicine.

She recalls a charmed time of social awakening on campus, with the emergence of Māori activist group Ngā Tamatoa; Germaine Greer's controversial visit, which became a flashpoint of moral outrage; and the protest photographer John Miller working for *Craccum*.

"Women's issues were coming to the fore then. I was intellectually aware of racial disconnect in New Zealand, but not spiritually aware."

Clare held a raft of public roles at the University, elected AUSA woman vice-president in 1971 and president midway through 1974, with Michael Walker, son of Ranginui, serving as vice-president. She also marched to Wellington, delivering an anti-nuclear protest letter to then prime minister Bill Rowling; ran a food co-op; and was later a University Council member.

But by the time Clare reached the Hokianga as a locum, and later as a permanent GP, she remained completely unprepared for working in a predominantly Māori community.

"I would have had to have grown up in a Māori community," she says. "Pākehā growing up here [in the Hokianga], depending on how much they want to embrace the Māori world, automatically know stuff that urban Pākehā don't really know, and often don't want to know either."

A Place to Stand is a series of fictionalised vignettes and reflections seen through the lens of her 30-year engagement with communities in the North.

She describes it as her 'book'. "I don't call it a memoir," she says. And neither is it a collection of medical stories.

"Sex, age, place – those details aren't important. It's the principle behind them – the overriding theme of being Pākehā in a Māori world. To make a difference as Pākehā, you must learn, discover something of that Māori world."

She has always been attracted to writing. In 2006, she balanced work in the North with a Master of Creative Writing under the supervision of Mike Johnson, creating a portfolio of poetry.

"The sound of good writing, of poetry, has a way of conveying a feeling, an emotion, a truth, if you like."

Writing a book was never in her plan, but she remembers John Berger's *A Fortunate Man* sparking the idea of how a story could be told: "An essay of reflections and photographs following the rounds of an English GP. It poses the question, 'Could you call the doctor a good man or a fortunate one to have done the work he enjoyed?'"

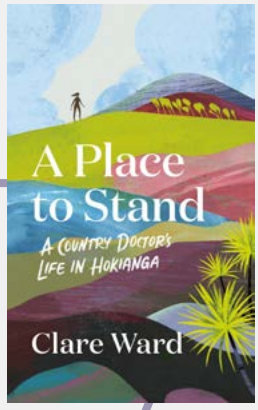
Another book to catch Clare's interest was penned by author and medical doctor Mikhail Bulgakov. Called *A Young Doctor's Notebook*, it is a fictionalised diary of an inexperienced doctor venturing into the outer reaches of Russia's hinterlands "taking on work people would never usually do".

"Isolation is an inherent part of rural doctoring," says Clare. "You need to be prepared to take on almost anything. It is not a nine-to-five occupation.

"Time and distance affect decisions," she says. "The base hospital 150km away, petrol prices rocketing. In Auckland, if you have a heart attack, a stroke, a car accident, you might be ten minutes from assistance or time-sensitive medication; up here, it would be two hours, even with the helicopter."

Still, Clare encourages the next generation to consider a career beyond the city lights.

"Rural doctoring becomes part of you, and you become part of it. It has its own sort of delight and reward, satisfaction and fulfilment." ■



***A Place to Stand* by Clare Ward is published by Allen & Unwin Aotearoa New Zealand.**
RRP $38

New muse

Established in the early eighteenth century, Stowe Gardens in Buckinghamshire is considered a quintessential example of the landscape garden tradition in Britain.

The tradition sought to elevate the natural environment, while also radically 'civilising' it; in landscape gardens such as Stowe, the use of Greco-Roman motifs and architecture was one way of portraying England as a place of heroism, learning and higher order.

A visit to Stowe in 2024 provided a framework for the themes running through *Ruin on the Cascade*, a 2025 exhibition by alumna and contemporary Māori artist Ayesha Green. Central to the exhibition was her series of portraits called 'The Muses', depicting classical statues of Greek muses at Stowe.

Part of the University of Auckland Art Collection, 'Clio' is one of these portraits, which interrogate ideas of class, the use of land, ethics and British Imperialism.

Clio is the patron of history and her name means 'proclaimer', adding significance to the complex historical themes communicated through the body of work. In the foreground, Green depicts British wildflowers that partially shroud the statue. This creates a symbolic juxtaposition, suggesting the voracity of English culture through colonialism and the Crown's consumption of other cultures throughout history.

A 40 under 40 recipient, Green holds a Master of Fine Arts from Elam (2013), and a Graduate Diploma in Art, specialising in museums and cultural heritage (2016). 'Clio' can be viewed on Level 1 of Old Choral Hall on the City Campus. ■

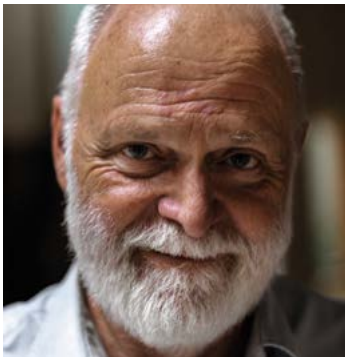


artcollection.auckland.ac.nz

AYESHA GREEN. CLIO (2025). ACRYLIC ON CANVAS. UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND ART COLLECTION.

Terry Stringer: ever surprising

A new book sheds light on the sculptor's continuously inventive practice. By Caitlin Sykes



Left Terry Stringer
PHOTO: JANE USSHER

Below left Linda Tyler

Every Thursday for a year, art historian Associate Professor Linda Tyler would visit artist Terry Stringer, ONZM in his Auckland home and studio to discuss his practice and its evolution.

Those conversations formed a basis for her essays in a major new book on the sculptor, which she also edited. Lushly and extensively illustrated with photographs by Jane Ussher of the artist in his studio, and of his works by distinguished art photographer Haru Sameshima, *Stringer: The Art of Terry Stringer* comprehensively catalogues the artist's practice, sustained over 60 years.

Stringer's bronze sculptures, spanning small to large, feature in New Zealand's most prominent public and private art collections, as well as public spaces. The latter includes 'Mountain Fountain', commissioned for Auckland's Aotea Square, and now sited outside Holy Trinity Cathedral in Parnell.

While that monumental work depicts a thrusting, Cubist volcano, the Elam alumnus is perhaps best known for his depictions of the human figure.

Other recurring themes are shifts between 2D and 3D, introducing multiple perspectives, and elements of surprise and optical illusion – what Linda calls "clever little tricks". These require viewers to move around and interrogate his works to reveal their secrets, often inviting touch. His 2018 sculpture 'Linear Head of a Boy', for example, only reveals the boy's face 'fully formed' when viewed at a specific angle, and from behind the work instead appears as a pair of hands, reaching out to clasp.



"Not everything is an easy get," explains Linda. "Not everything is revealed on first glance."

That love of clever tricks, she says, is also reflected in Stringer's collection of Victorian and Edwardian interactive and optical 'amusements', which are a feature in his studio space, and have been captured in Ussher's photography for the book.

So, during those successive Thursday sessions with Stringer, what surprises did the artist himself reveal about his practice over cups of tea?

One surprise, says Linda, relates to 'Mountain Fountain' (1980), which Stringer produced after winning a competition held by Auckland City Council to select a work featuring running water for Aotea Square.

"It's a major piece," says Linda, "and I assumed he would have had the bronze foundry to do it; that he would have had all the apparatus he needed. But, of course, in those days, there wasn't anything like that. There wasn't a commercial bronze foundry."

Instead, she explains, the architectural practice where Stringer worked part-time as a cleaner collaborated with him to use architectural methods of working with bronze to bring his vision to life.

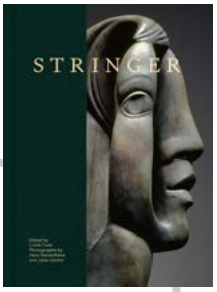
Collaborations with architects have continued, including the creation of his Zealandia Sculpture Garden in Mahurangi with architect and Distinguished Alumnus, the late Pip Cheshire.

Stringer has said of his own practice that "it has been a lifetime of pursuing one idea. I have to say that I am making the same sculpture over and over, and that it changes just a little each time, each piece of it being a new puzzle to solve."

Linda says she came to see this as a process of "returning, of constantly circling back".

His last series of sculptures, for example, called *Revisitations*, incorporated older works and found objects into new pieces. While the artist has remained tightly focused on the figure, his endless reconfigurations of it have allowed him to keep abreast of changes in the art world, "without ever being a creature of fashion, because he has stayed true to this particular motif", says Linda.

"He's endlessly imaginative and creative, always thinking about how to enliven the experience of his work and surprise the viewer."



***Stringer: The Art of Terry Stringer*, edited by Linda Tyler, is published by Massey University Press.** $90

We have one copy to give away. Email ingenio@auckland.ac.nz with 'Stringer' in the subject line before 11 December 2026 to be in the draw.



Podcast Picks

Dr Patrick Savage is the director of the CompMusic Lab for comparative and computational musicology, and the host of *Many Voices: A World Music Podcast*. He is currently working in the School of Psychology on a Rutherford Discovery Fellowship and shares his podcast picks with Nikki Addison.

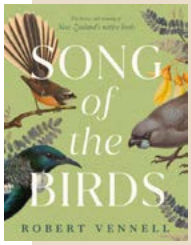
Can you tell us a little about your own podcast?
I started *Many Voices: A World Music Podcast* in May 2026, after wanting to get a deeper understanding of the stories and meanings behind the songs my collaborators have been singing in our scientific collaborations, comparing singing and speaking in diverse languages around the globe. Each week I ask a guest who speaks a non-English language to share six of their favourite songs: old and new, happy and sad, songs that make them want to dance and want to sing. I love learning new songs outside of the English ones many of us know and love.

What's your favourite podcast and why?
I love BBC's *Desert Island Discs*, where guests talk about the eight musical discs they'd take with them if they were cast away to a desert island. I love how I can learn about people's lives through the music that is most meaningful to them.

When do you listen to podcasts?
I used to love reading for pleasure, but got out of the habit between becoming an academic and a parent. I've recently got back into it via audiobooks and podcasts, while doing things like commuting, cooking and mountain biking – the uphill climb is a great time to enjoy podcasts and audiobooks, downhill not so much.

Which podcasts in your area of expertise would you recommend to others?
Acoustic World, run by bioacoustics PhD student Marco Maiolini, is excellent for anyone interested in the biology of sound. Even though I have a bit of expertise, there was lots that surprised me. For example, I had no idea how rich the acoustic world of fishes was – and it was great to hear audio examples of famous phenomena like Hoover the talking seal. ■

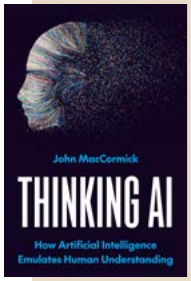
Links to the above podcasts can be found in the story online at **auckland.ac.nz/ingenio**



Song of the Birds
From the bestselling author of *The Meaning of Trees* comes this history of the native birds of New Zealand. Science alumnus Robert Vennell uncovers how the birds of Aotearoa have been used as a source of food, fashion, friendship, science and spirituality. The book also features stunning and extensive illustrations and photography.
Robert Vennell, HarperCollins NZ, $55



A Sky Full of Fire
New Zealand's legendary Pink and White Terraces were tragically destroyed during the 1886 eruption of Mount Tarawera. In this historical novel, Master of Creative Writing alumna Sarah Ell recounts the final days of this natural wonder while exploring themes of identity and place.
Sarah Ell, Bateman Books, $39



Thinking AI
Science alumnus and computer scientist John MacCormick digs into the question: can machines think like a human? As he explains the ideas behind the two main pillars of the twenty-first century AI revolution – deep neural networks and reinforcement learning – he also argues that,in many ways, the answer to that question is 'yes'.
John MacCormick, Princeton University Press, $52



This Must Be the Island – Liga Hanai e Motu
In 2010, poet-artists John Puhiatau Pule and Arts alumnus Gregory O'Brien embarked on a voyage of art-making and travel around the South Pacific, making collaborative etchings, writing poetry, and corresponding. This book charts their creative friendship and art project, which is described 'as expansive and all-encompassing as the Pacific'.
Gregory O'Brien and John Puhiatau Pule, Massey University Press; $70



Shane Cotton: Moerewa, Liquid Sleep
Leading art writer Anthony Byrt presents this career-spanning look at the work of Shane Cotton, considered one of New Zealand's most important living artists. An Arts alumnus, Byrt takes readers on a voyage into Te Tai Tokerau, to unravel the relationships, landscapes and histories that are the wellspring of Cotton's art.
Anthony Byrt, Auckland University Press, $90



Birdlands
From our sub-Antarctic islands to the scattered volcanic islands of Tīkapa Moana/Hauraki Gulf, *Birdlands* offers a rare insight into the largely inaccessible places where birds still thrive. Seabird scientist, photographer and Faculty of Science alumna and staff member Edin Whitehead captures life among albatrosses, petrels and more.
Edin Whitehead, Penguin, $50

Connection Points

Facebook: UoAAlumni Instagram: @AucklandAlumni
LinkedIn: Auckland University Alumni and Friends Email: alumni@auckland.ac.nz



LISTEN TO

Raising the Bar

How can we support a healthy brain throughout life? What geopolitical forces are influencing our world? How does art reshape the way we think and feel? Hear experts answer big questions by catching up on talks from Raising the Bar Auckland. The annual event brings researchers face-to-face with curious audiences at bars around the city – but if you couldn't make it in person, you can listen to the talks from 2026, and previous years, on Spotify or other audio platforms.

auckland.ac.nz/rtb



INTRODUCING

The Alumni Advisory Group

Established this year, the Alumni Advisory Group (AAG) is helping us read the pulse of our community and chart a course for its future direction. The group comprises respected alumni leaders from a wide range of backgrounds, reflecting the diversity and global reach of the University's alumni network. To learn more about the AAG's members visit: **auckland.ac.nz/aag**

JOIN

Our virtual book club

Keen to broaden your literary repertoire? Join our online book club, where you'll read and discuss up to five books a year with other members of the University community. Members can also join exclusive author talks, gaining deeper insights into writers' works and the perspectives that shape them.

auckland.ac.nz/virtual-book-club



EXPERIENCE

Summer at Hiwa

Build strength, boost your well-being or simply try something new at Hiwa – the University's state-of-the-art recreation and wellness centre. Alumni can access discounted rates across a range of membership and pass options. And if you haven't yet experienced the facilities at Hiwa, you can try a free class or take a tour. Find this offer and other exclusive alumni benefits at **auckland.ac.nz/alumni-benefits**



Brianna Parkinson *In-between* (2025) BFA

SEE

Emerging design and art talent

Experience the creativity, ideas and innovation of graduating University of Auckland students during the upcoming showcase season. The ReDesign Graduate Showcase on 6 November highlights Design Programme projects that push the boundaries of design thinking, technology, creativity and problem-solving. And don't miss the Elam Grad Show 28–29 November, 10am–4pm, featuring works by emerging artists across sculpture, painting, ceramics, photography and more.

auckland.ac.nz/redesign-2026
auckland.ac.nz/elam-grad-show-2026

INSPIRE

The next generation

Whether it's the offer of career advice, a connection or just a few words of encouragement, your support as a mentor can make a lasting difference. Joining the University's online mentoring programme, Alumni Connect, offers alumni the chance to share their experience, insights and encouragement with current students as they take their next steps. Find out more at **auckland.ac.nz/alumni-connect**

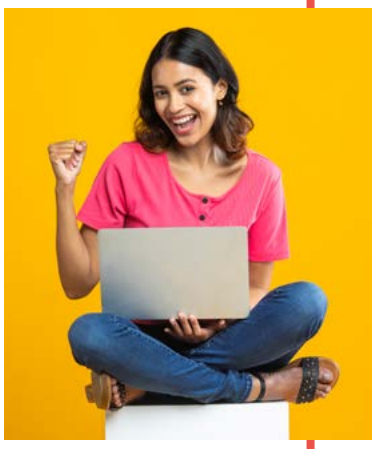


WIN

When you update your details

Keep connected to the latest alumni news, events and opportunities by ensuring your contact details are up to date. Sharing your preferred email and address details only takes a moment and ensures you receive invitations to alumni events in your hometown, wherever that may be.

Update your details before 28 February 2027 and you'll automatically go in the draw to win one of five fabulous prizes worth up to $500 each: **alumni.auckland.ac.nz/update**



NOMINATE

40 Under 40

Our alumni community teems with talented leaders, innovators and changemakers who are making a difference across Aotearoa and around the world. In 2027, the University will celebrate another 40 exceptional alumni aged under 40, whose achievements are creating impact in business, the arts, technology, community service and beyond. Nominate an inspiring individual and discover the stories of past recipients at **auckland.ac.nz/40-under-40**



A Gift To The Future

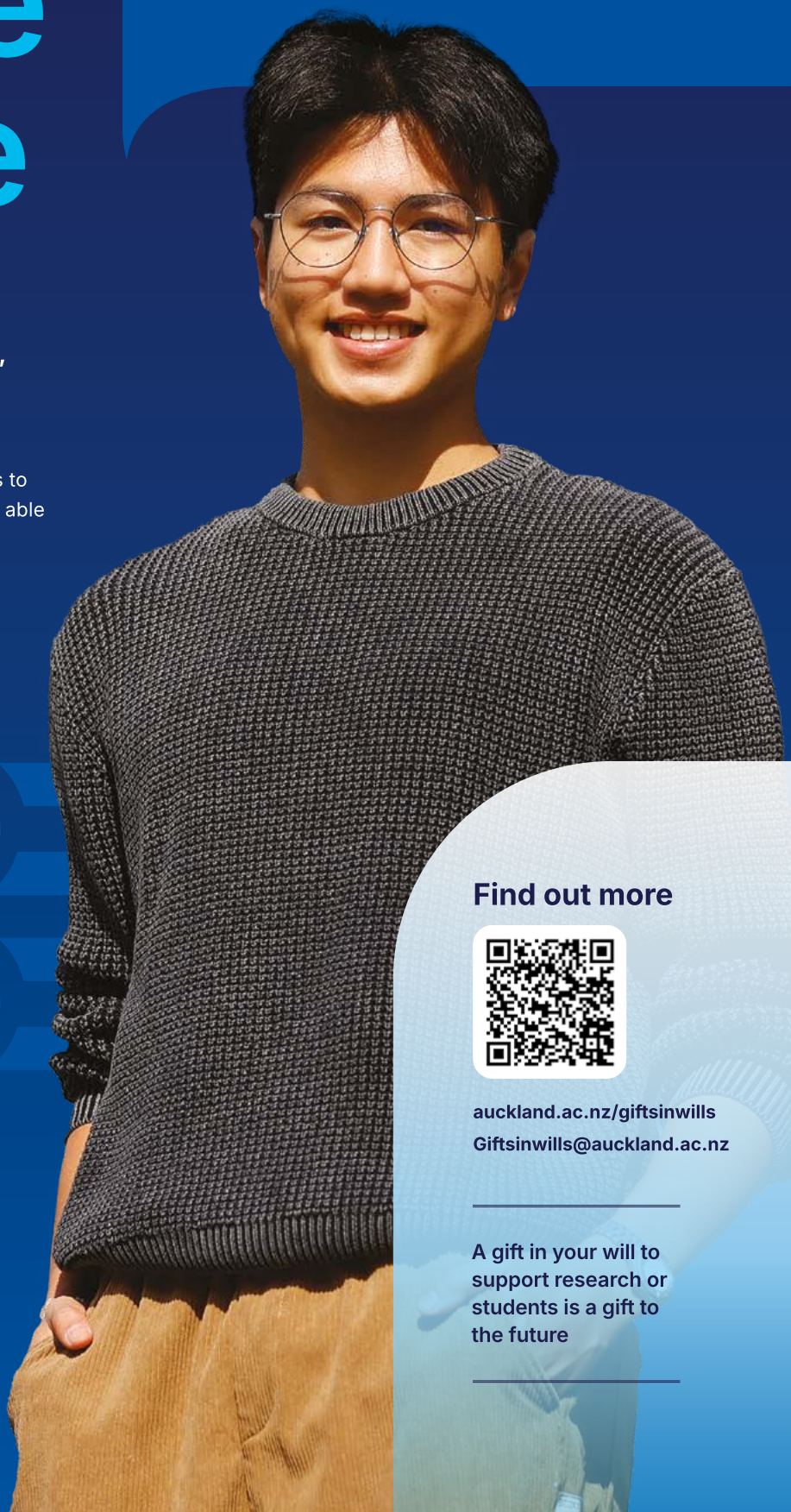
In 1884, Thomas B Gillies, a judge in the Supreme Court of New Zealand, gave £3,000 to set up scholarships in science.

The intention of Thomas and his late wife was to support students who might not otherwise be able to attend university.

More than 200 students have now benefitted from their vision.

> **“Having a stranger support me with this act of kindness has been very inspiring and encouraging.”**

WILCO NG
Gillies Scholarship recipient | Applied Physics student



Find out more

auckland.ac.nz/giftsinwills
Giftsinwills@auckland.ac.nz

A gift in your will to support research or students is a gift to the future

Waipapa Taumata Rau
University of Auckland