



# UniNews



## GOOD NATURE

Urban designer Zoë Avery's  
vision for a greener future

Page 6

## ABILITY TO INSPIRE

Dean of Arts Robert Greenberg  
reflects on his time in the job

Page 3

## HITTING THE MARC

Paul Kilmartin on making the  
most of wine waste

Page 8

## MUSIC TO HIS EARS

The Music Lab's award-winning  
Samuel Mehr

Page 9

# IN THE NEWS

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



Claire Charters

## INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

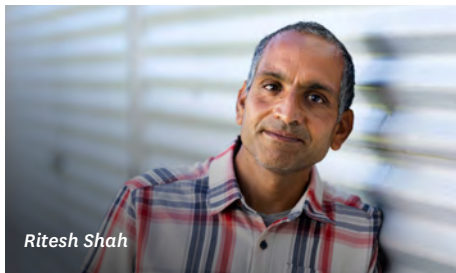
Aotearoa has relied heavily on its progressive reputation around Indigenous people's rights, Professor Claire Charters (Faculty of Law) told *E-Tangata*. "That's not something we can maintain under the current government, especially with its explicit pushback on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." **Link:** [tinyurl.com/E-Tangata-Charters-rights](https://tinyurl.com/E-Tangata-Charters-rights)



Boyd Swinburn

## STAR RATINGS HEALTHY?

Healthy star ratings on processed foods have had limited benefits and plenty of critics. Professor of Population Nutrition and Global Health Boyd Swinburn told RNZ podcast *The Detail* that collaborating with the food industry was a mistake and the star ratings should be mandatory on all packaged food. **Link:** [tinyurl.com/Newsroom-boyd-labels](https://tinyurl.com/Newsroom-boyd-labels)



Ritesh Shah

## PALESTINIAN CHILDREN'S LIVES

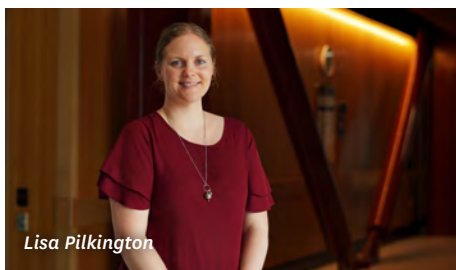
Dr Ritesh Shah, from the Faculty of Education and Social Work, spoke to Jack Tame on TVNZ's Q+A about the disastrous situation for Palestinian children in Gaza who "have to weather conflict after conflict". Ritesh also spoke on the politics of aid, particularly in the case of UNRWA, and the future of the 'two-state solution'. **Link:** [tinyurl.com/TVNZ-Ritesh-Gaza](https://tinyurl.com/TVNZ-Ritesh-Gaza)



James Russell

## PRICE OF CONSERVATION

Nearly \$500,000 to kill a stoat on an island in Fiordland was money well spent, Professor James Russell of the School of Biological Sciences told RNZ. The Department of Conservation operation was to protect the predator-free status of an island that's home to birds including the critically endangered kākāpō. **Link:** [tinyurl.com/RNZ-James-stoat](https://tinyurl.com/RNZ-James-stoat)



Lisa Pilkington

## ALCOHOL IN WASTEWATER

Dr Lisa Pilkington (School of Chemical Sciences) told RNZ about the results of the first large-scale trial of wastewater testing to monitor alcohol consumption. Monitoring of ten water catchments covering about 40 percent of the population showed people in smaller towns tended to drink more than those in big cities. **Link:** [tinyurl.com/RNZ-Lisa-wastewater](https://tinyurl.com/RNZ-Lisa-wastewater)



Martje Abbenhuis

## LESSON IN DIPLOMACY

Professor Martje Abbenhuis (Arts) featured in a podcast from UK-based platform Faculti about the Congress of Vienna, a set of diplomatic meetings in 1814-1815 to agree on a new constitutional order in Europe after Napoleon's downfall. The Faculti hosts more than 8,000 researcher interviews with a wide international audience. **Link:** [tinyurl.com/Faculti-Martje](https://tinyurl.com/Faculti-Martje)

## THIS ISSUE

Farewell to Robert Greenberg 3

Good to Know 4-5

- New schools partnership
- Subject rankings rise
- Landmark dementia study
- Researchers' impact recognised

Zoë Avery's green vision 6-7

Paul Kilmartin 8

Prize-winning scientist Sam Mehr 9

Arts and books 10-11

Māramatanga 12

Cover photo by Chris Loufte

Editor: Caitlin Sykes  
[caitlin.sykes@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:caitlin.sykes@auckland.ac.nz)  
Photography: Chris Loufte, Elise Manahan, William Chea  
Design: Jericho Jayme  
Production: University of Auckland  
Volume 54 – Issue 3 – May 2024  
Published by: Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland  
Communications Office,  
Alfred Nathan House, 24 Princes Street,  
Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142  
Web: [auckland.ac.nz/UniNews](http://auckland.ac.nz/UniNews)

Something to share? The next *UniNews* is June 2024, copy due 13 May.  
Email: [uninews@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:uninews@auckland.ac.nz)

For the fortnightly Whaimōhio The Loop newsletter, email: [staff-comms@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:staff-comms@auckland.ac.nz).  
Deadlines are on the intranet under News, Events and Notices, The Loop.

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

## ROBERT GREENBERG: THE ABILITY TO INSPIRE

After 11 years heading the Faculty of Arts as dean, Professor Robert Greenberg is moving on to a new role in Australia. He reflects on his time at the University.



Professor Robert Greenberg in the new B201 building. Photo: Elise Manahan

**If anyone recognises Professor Robert Greenberg, it's the students at graduation, he says.**

"I'm the blind dean who reads their names in Tongan, Samoan, Māori, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Arabic and English. I also stand up at meetings and events to do a mihi or waiata."

He's also the dean who holds regular, informal 'pop-in hours' – a chance to hear suggestions or complaints from staff. And he likes to visit them in hospital when they're sick.

Robert, who has held positions at Yale and Georgetown among others, was dean and professor at Hunter College of the City University of New York, before arriving 'fresh off the boat' from the US in 2013. Choosing from among many rich things the job has offered him after arriving he says connecting with his own values rates highly.

"Being Jewish, we're brought up with charity [tzdaka], respect for learning, and a desire to make the world a better place [tikkun olam]."

The biggest challenge in his first year, however, was implementing the change from 16 departments and centres into four schools.

"I was brought in at the end of that process. It wasn't a popular development at a challenging time, as we had fewer professional staff supporting our academic staff – although people at least were understanding that I was inheriting this decision."

Under his leadership, the faculty has significantly increased, retained and promoted its Māori and Pacific staff; branched into areas in those disciplines like the environment and mental health; and increased te reo Māori capacity. The number of academics in Te Wānanga o Waipapa (School of Māori Studies and Pacific Studies) has more than doubled in the past eight years.

As a linguist with expertise in South Slavic languages, he is also notable for embracing te reo Māori and speaking it confidently at official events.

***"I love the ability to inspire young people to contribute to solutions to global challenges like climate change; if I've done that, I'll be very happy."***

**– Professor Robert Greenberg, Dean, Faculty of Arts**

On his watch, the faculty introduced popular programmes responding to changes in students' interests, such as undergraduate degrees in communications and global studies, and masters programmes in Indigenous Studies and Conflict and Terrorism Studies; as well as the Art Scholars programme, where students from across the faculty grapple with social, economic and cultural questions through discussions and debates.

"It was very satisfying to watch some of these things take off," he says.

"We've achieved a lot as an Arts leadership team, as well as supporting people who have taken on significant University or national leadership roles themselves; like [Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific] Jemaima Tiatia-Siau and Professor Tracey McIntosh, and of course we have major research centres like Ngā Pae O Te Māramatanga, the James Henare Research Centre, the Public Policy Institute, Koi Tū, and COMPASS."

And with these new and existing centres has come a welcome increase in external funding from around \$500,000 in 2013 to around \$10 million annually, he says. That income, together with more than \$20 million in philanthropy, has made

his faculty stronger during his tenure, he says.

Gender equity had also been a strong focus. "We've had more women promoted to professor, and we've worked hard to identify women who might have held back or been held back."

Another big challenge came in 2016 when the equivalent full time student numbers took a dive.

"We really needed to think about what we were doing in the faculty from a curricular perspective, so we started the 'BA renewal', which was to make the Bachelor of Arts more attractive to our students and simplify the structure."

The project helped improve the faculty's financial position and increased the relevance of its teaching and learning programmes.

One of the reasons he went into academia, he says, was to work with students. "I love the ability to inspire young people to contribute to solutions to global challenges like climate change; if I've done that, I'll be very happy."

And thanks to his vision, and that of other University leaders, students and staff in the faculty now have a beautiful new space in which to study and work – building B201 on Symonds Street. Unfortunately, however, he'll only get to enjoy his new office for a few more weeks.

So does he think being here – and for much longer than the usual five-year dean's tenure – has changed him? "I think it has. I'll always look back on this University and faculty with very warm feelings. I'm no longer a stranger; it's now my home, and I'm so proud of the many things we have achieved here together."

**Professor Robert Greenberg is taking up a role as a Pro Vice-Chancellor at the University of Newcastle, Australia. He leaves the University of Auckland on 20 May when Professor Greg Booth becomes acting Dean.**

■ Julianne Evans

**Full story: [auckland.ac.nz/greenberg-farewell](http://auckland.ac.nz/greenberg-farewell)**



University and school representatives formalised their partnership at a special ceremony in April. Photo: Elise Manahan

## NEW SCHOOLS

## PARTNERSHIP

**The University has launched a new partnership to improve Māori and Pacific University Entrance pass rates and increase success at tertiary level.**

The partnership with 12 local secondary schools, which launched at the University on 11 April, aims to achieve University Entrance (UE) parity for Māori and Pacific learners by 2030.

Liletina Vaka, associate director of Schools and Community Engagement, says the partnership is the first of its kind domestically and aims to create a wider impact.

“What we learn across the next six years about

improving rates for Māori and Pacific learners can, and should be, applied to all students,” says Liletina.

“UE rates are declining across all student groups, although educational outcomes are worsening at a quicker rate for our Māori and Pacific learners.”

Māori and Pacific UE attainment dropped from 40 percent in 2020 to 34 percent in 2022, compared with national UE attainment of 53 percent in 2020 and 50 percent in 2022.

Liletina says a lack of preparedness due to inequities for Māori and Pacific learners entering university has been identified as a major barrier, with factors such as attaining few credits through external exams and a lack

of awareness around prerequisite courses stifling success.

Pro Vice-Chancellor Māori Associate, Professor Te Kawehau Hoskins says retaining students at school to achieve UE is critical to them embarking on tertiary education.

“Success in tertiary education is an important pathway for improving the life chances of Māori and Pacific students and their communities,” says Te Kawehau.

“We look forward to productive forms of collaboration with our kura in the preparation, participation and success of our taurua.”

■ Kim Meredith

**Full story: [auckland.ac.nz/schools-partnership-to-lift-success](https://auckland.ac.nz/schools-partnership-to-lift-success)**

## SUBJECT RANKINGS RISE

**The University has added to its global reputation with its results in the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2024.**

Ten of the subjects taught at Waipapa Taumata Rau have been ranked in the top 50 subjects worldwide, based on academic and employer reputation as well as research, compared with eight in 2023. In the top 100, the University has 23 ranked subjects.

New entrants to the top 50 were Marketing, ranking 21-50, and Anatomy and Physiology, which was ranked 45th equal.

Sports-related subjects came in at equal 28th, up from 32 in 2023. Education held firm at 37, while Archaeology was up to 39th equal, from 46th in 2023.

The other subjects to make the top 50 were Psychology (45), Civil Engineering (46), English (48), Anthropology (48) and Linguistics (49).

The QS Subject Rankings comprise a research component but also a strong employer reputation component.

Professor Frank Bloomfield (pictured), Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, says it's heartening to know that people recognise the University as being a leader globally.

“For staff to know that the research and research-led teaching they do is highly valued by their international peers is empowering. Having ten subjects ranked in the top 50 in the world reflects the quality of our research and teaching and contributes to University of Auckland degrees being recognised globally.”

He says in research, academics and students are making significant strides in addressing some of the world's most pressing challenges, from climate change through to healthcare disparities.

“Our interdisciplinary approach fosters collaboration and innovation and we're developing solutions that resonate globally.

“Our students know the importance of this kind of work.”

**Full story: [auckland.ac.nz/qs-subjects-2024](https://auckland.ac.nz/qs-subjects-2024)**



## LANDMARK DEMENTIA STUDY

**A new study into dementia starts with the shocking premise that we don't really know how many Kiwis are affected by it, or their cultural background.**

The IDEA (Impact of Dementia mate wareware and Equity in Aotearoa) study aims to talk to 2,100 older people and their families in their own language to establish how many people have dementia across four ethnic groups (Pākehā, Chinese, Indian and Fijian Indian).

Then researchers can work out how that matches (or doesn't match) existing health data, and what is needed to support different ethnic groups to care for their elderly. Parallel studies are taking place in Māori and Pacific communities.

International evidence suggests as many as 60 percent of people with dementia are never diagnosed, with figures particularly high in Chinese and Indian communities, where the percentage of elderly is growing faster than average.

Professor Ngaire Kerse, the University's Joyce Cook Chair in Ageing Well, is leading the study. She says Asian elders, for example, are rarely referred to local memory services, while language and cultural issues can also make it difficult for some to access appropriate support.

Such was the case for Kamanie Silochan whose mum, Subhuma Govender, known as Dolly, was



*Hindi-speaking research assistant/interviewer Mary Dsouza door-knocking in Mission Heights, Auckland.*

diagnosed with dementia in her mid-70s. The family always wanted Dolly to remain at home, which she did for 16 years, but at times it was tough, says Kamanie.

"Many times we were crying out for home-centred dementia-specific help and advice, and it was completely lacking."

Anecdotal evidence suggests many families – particularly non-Pākehā – choose to care for relatives at home, but often can't get the support they need. The IDEA study aims to find out the prevalence of dementia in communities and how it affects individuals and their families.

Stage one of the study kicked off in April and involves more than 50 multicultural and multilingual researchers door-knocking thousands of homes in targeted areas of Auckland and Christchurch. They are looking for eligible older adults from the four ethnic groups to take part in a memory survey.

Later in the year, a wider group of participants will be recruited for interviews to explore people's experiences of the support they get when faced with a dementia diagnosis.

■ Nikki Mandow

**See: [auckland.ac.nz/idea-dementia-study](http://auckland.ac.nz/idea-dementia-study)**

## RESEARCHERS WITH GLOBAL REACH

**An event celebrating University researchers whose work has global impact was held recently, highlighting the diverse range of researchers who feature in two international surveys of the world's top academics.**

The University acknowledged the ambition and effort of its highly cited researchers at the 'Hikina kia Tutuki Rise to the Challenge: Researchers with Global Impact' event at the Fale on 10 April.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater noted at the event that "when we listen to researchers and think about research excellence, we are seeing evidence of deep, meaningful and engaged thinking".

The Clarivate Highly Cited Researchers list is based on their Web of Science database of academic outputs, with those featuring on the list being in the top one percent in their field in terms of number of citations over a ten-year period or having equivalent reach in cross-field or interdisciplinary research.

The Stanford Elsevier database, now in its fifth iteration, uses a standardised citation method to rank the top two percent of researchers, as a measure of their influence and global research impact.

Including honorary and emeritus academics, the University has eight researchers represented on the Clarivate list and more than 200 in the Stanford Elsevier database.

The event highlighted six researchers from diverse academic fields – with representation from education and social work, medical and health sciences, business and economics, and science – emphasising the comprehensive research strengths of the University.

The speakers, who presented 'TED-style' talks, included Professor Jay Marlowe, Professor Cliona Ni Mhurchu, Professor Snezhina Michailova, Senior Lecturer Dr Fan Zhu, Professor Dawn Freshwater and Professor Saeid Baroutian.

■ Gilbert Wong

**Full story: [auckland.ac.nz/research-impact](http://auckland.ac.nz/research-impact)**



*Vice-Chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater*



*Nature should be considered as critical infrastructure, says Zoë Avery.  
Photo: Chris Loufte*

## GOOD NATURE: ZOË AVERY'S FUTURE VISION

To help address the 'polycrisis' of climate change, biodiversity collapse and energy consumption, our cities need to be greener, healthier and more sustainable. Urban designer Zoë Avery is leading the charge.

### **In the concrete jungles of modern cities, the importance of nature often gets overlooked.**

But for urban designer Zoë Avery, nature isn't a mere afterthought; it's a necessity to support life and to help with resilient, liveable, sustainable cities in the face of climate change and rapid urbanisation.

"Nature is a vital component of a healthy city and should be considered as critical infrastructure," she says.

As the Associate Director of Design (Urban Planning) and a professional teaching fellow at Te Pare School of Architecture and Planning, Zoë champions a holistic approach to urban design that looks to integrate nature into the very fabric of our cities. "With the effects of climate change, more flooding and drought and biodiversity

collapse, we need a vision to achieve healthy, resilient, biodiverse, and more equitable cities for people and nature.

"We've lost 70 percent of the populations of animals, birds, fish, reptiles and insects since I've been on the planet. And while some still think nature is an expensive option, we must remember 100 percent of the economy is dependent on nature, from the food we eat to the air we breathe. Embracing nature and blue green networks can help us to solve environmental challenges holistically and sustainably."

This year she is spearheading efforts for change as the lead organiser of the World Green Infrastructure Congress, which is being hosted by the School of Architecture and Planning, from 3 to 5 September.

The congress brings together 100 speakers from around the world who are at the forefront of using nature-based solutions to help make cities greener and healthier.

"It is a powerful catalyst that will hopefully empower us to reclaim our cities and neighbourhoods, and forge a path towards a greener future."

Nature-based solutions provide cities with multiple benefits, including stormwater mitigation, urban heat reduction, pollution reduction, increased well-being and biodiversity, says Zoë.

Common strategies involve planting trees for shade and air purification, as well as incorporating elements like healthy soil and a mix of mid- and low-canopy native vegetation

to support biodiversity. Other examples include living roofs, habitat features for wildlife, and moving away from traditional landscaping practices towards those that prioritise ecological health.

“This requires a physiological shift from the typical well-manicured lawns, grassed berms and low-diversity exotic gardens we are used to.”

But encouraging a shift in perspective is just one of many challenges. Zoë points out that current policies and legislation often see developers prioritise short-term gains over long-term sustainability.

“Understanding the true cost to society is not in the developer’s remit. The operating model results in sprawled out buildings and spaces being designed and constructed, loss of healthy soil, increased impermeable areas and limited space for planting vegetation. Meanwhile, the general public foot the majority of the costs for infrastructure, traffic congestion, and reduced mental health and wellbeing.”

Tāmaki Makaurau serves as a striking example of this issue. Since the 1960s, we have been designing around vehicles rather than people, which has resulted in huge amounts of impervious surfaces and competing requirements for the limited space we have, says Zoë.

“Auckland has an urban ngahere (forest) strategy that aims for canopy cover of at least 15 percent. But some of the mahi we’ve been doing is showing that we can’t achieve those targets under our current regulations. Our Unitary Plan rules don’t require or leave enough space for nature.”

**“If we dedicated time to sit in nature and connect to it ... I have no doubt the world would be a better place.”**

**– Zoë Avery, School of Architecture and Planning**

Zoë says her love of nature stems from her belief that it’s a miracle and worth protecting.

“I remember talking to my dad on the way to the school bus stop when I was eight years old, asking why we were polluting so much. He told me that if we could get people to somehow understand that the world is such an incredible phenomenon, we could change the plan – but the way we treated the planet, humans were bound for their own self-destruction,” she recalls.

“If we dedicated time to sit in nature and connect to it, to understand its magic and interconnectedness, I have no doubt the world would be a better place. We would be kinder to nature and recognise our innate connection to it.”

Before joining the University, Zoë spent 25 years working for private consultancies but grew weary of the bureaucratic ‘box ticking’ exercises that were part of the job. In need of a change that aligned with the work she was doing at the Environment Agency in London, she started urban design company, The Urbanist.

“I thought the best way to effect change was through creative work, which I do with

The Urbanist, and by teaching students to think differently to help change the system, because the system is clearly not working.”

Her passion for redefining urban spaces as havens where people and nature coexist harmoniously was recognised in 2023 when a team she was part of won the Built Environment Green Roof Award for the Hundertwasser Art Centre and Wairau Māori Art Gallery, in Whangārei.

The centre was originally designed by the late architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser in 1993, and Zoë worked on the concept and detailed design of its living roof, which was completed in 2022 and includes 4,000 plants. The process involved collaboration among architects, landscape designers, engineers and environmental experts, with input from iwi and community stakeholders.

“Our design goal was to create a forest using a variety of New Zealand native plants. We integrated endemic species with fruiting trees, allowing people to wander through the forest and pick fruit.”

Zoë sees opportunities for transformation everywhere she looks – but says any change will require a comprehensive and unified response.

“This polycrisis of climate change, biodiversity collapse and energy consumption requires us to collectively come up with a vision for Aotearoa centred on nature-based solutions. To protect our environment, we need to unite and learn from one another.

“We simply don’t have a choice but to build resilient cities.”

■ Hussein Moses



*Zoë was part of the award-winning team that worked on the green roof of the Hundertwasser Art Centre and Wairau Māori Art Gallery.*

*Photo: Zoë Avery*

## HITTING THE MARC

From wine to LPs, Professor Paul Kilmartin sees the impact of chemistry everywhere.

**In 2003, when a postgraduate Wine Science Programme was being planned at the University's Tāmaki campus, being in the right place at the right time meant Professor Paul Kilmartin ended up with the gig.**

"They had advertised for a professor and got some really good applicants – in fact, two outstanding ones. They spent several months negotiating and both turned it down!

"The Dean of Science, Dick Bellamy, turned to me and said, 'Well, we've got everything in place. Would you help us to get it going?'

"I jumped at the opportunity even though I was quite a junior staff member at that stage."

The rest, as they say, is history. The wine science research and teaching was conducted at Tāmaki for around a decade. Then the owners of Goldwater Estate on Waiheke offered the University the option to move its operations there.

"We think they liked what we were doing in training wine science students, and they wanted to give back to the industry."

Now the University trains up to 15 postgrads a year at the Goldwater Wine Science Centre. It also runs an undergraduate general interest wine science paper twice a year with around 90 students. Paul doesn't lead the programme any more but is very involved. He is leading a research programme creating high-value products from wine waste. Grape marc – the stems, skins and seeds left over from winemaking – is being transformed into food, paper, pharmaceutical, building and chemical products. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's Endeavour Fund awarded Paul's research team (which includes researchers from AUT, Crown Research Institute Scion and the University of Canterbury) \$9.8m over five years in 2023.

Paul is a professor of chemical sciences whose specialist field is electrochemistry. He says that nicely complements wine science. "Wine ageing is about oxidation-reduction chemistry."

Over the years, he has provided the wine industry with scientific intel on the influences that improve the flavours of Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir. He says if he had been smarter, he might have worked out a way to be "a bit more entrepreneurial" about his discoveries, but has no regrets.

Paul was drawn to chemistry at an early age, largely because of a desire to understand



Professor Paul Kilmartin at Goldwater Wine Science Centre on Waiheke, where he is researching wine waste. Photo: William Chea

the world from a mathematical, physical and biological perspective. That even extended to understanding the electrochemical process needed to make the stampers for pressing the masters of vinyl records.

"To get the sound right, the grooves on the record have to be really accurate from the wax master where they originally make the recorded sound ... it shows how fine-tuned electrochemistry has to be because you are copying across sound waves."

He has plenty of albums to assess – about 6,000 LPs and 78s, most inherited from his father who worked for HMV.

"I thought I'd get rid of them, but then I found this marvellous collection of labels going back to the 1890s. They convey some of the history of the gramophone record."

Music is a thing. He plays piano and inherited the grand piano and those 100 apple cases of records from the family home in Nelson, where he grew up on an apple orchard.

He was born in Dunedin, grew up in Nelson, then boarded at St Pat's Silverstream in Wellington before heading to Greenmeadows Marist seminary in Hawke's Bay. It was sited on a vineyard, now known as the Mission Estate.

"There were around 50-60 of us there, and it was a fantastic operation. We put on musicals, played touch rugby, it was a great experience. But by 1990, there were just four of us."

Paul also left but has maintained many friendships and an interest in wine and chemistry. He taught chemistry for two years in high school before starting his PhD at Auckland in 1993. He has been at the University ever since.

Growing up, he has said he didn't "feel Māori" (he's Ngāi Tahu, Irish/English and descended from the McLeod clan in Scotland), but in recent years, he has relished being involved in mātauranga Māori and Science.

Given that he's Māori and a scientist, he gave feedback on the NCEA Science curriculum in 2022 before its introduction this year. Two terms – 'whakapapa' and 'mauri' – had caused angst for the biologists and chemists contributing to the curriculum.

"But there's actually been a lot of interest in

**"There's been a lot of interest in how mātauranga Māori relates to chemistry."**

– Professor Paul Kilmartin,  
Faculty of Science

how mātauranga Māori relates to chemistry."

He says care is needed in how concepts like mauri are used within science.

"We regularly talk about the life-supporting capacity of rivers, the health of rivers and waterways and the chemical reactions that affect waterways. But in the draft NCEA they had brought in other definitions of mauri that were inconsistent with chemistry, so it was removed.

"Another example connecting science and mātauranga Māori might be investigating something like the museum items (taonga) made of harakeke (flax) – there's acid/base processes associated with their degradation."

Paul's faith is still important and he draws parallels between it and mātauranga Māori.

"I taught Year 13 chemistry, Year 12 maths and religious studies at St Bede's in Christchurch. In the religious studies classes, you sometimes stood back and asked, 'Where does science fit into things?' I remain very interested in the interplay of belief systems and people's culture, and how these relate to advances in modern sciences."

Paul has a busy diary, but you won't find it on his Outlook calendar. He's still using a little paper book to keep track of things. Don't ask for his mobile number either. He has never had a cellphone.

"But I'm quick to respond by email," he says. "My aim every day is to clear my inbox and remove things because then they're done."

He admits it has become difficult without a cellphone because there are many authenticating processes that need one, but for Authy he uses a token. "It has become a stubbornness on my part," he admits. "But when I leave the office I want to be away from it all."

■ Denise Montgomery



## SAMUEL MEHR: PRIZE-WINNING SCIENTIST

PM's prize is music to the ears of leading-edge researcher.

**Science is like sex: it may give some practical results, but that's not why we do it.**

That sentiment – a tweaked version of a well-known quote\* – finds favour with Dr Samuel Mehr, the winner of the Prime Minister's MacDiarmid Emerging Scientist Prize.

What is music? How does it work? Why does it exist? They're the big questions Samuel and The Music Lab, his international research group, seek to answer, drawing ideas and tools from cognitive and developmental psychology, data science and evolutionary anthropology.

Curiosity-driven basic science may be less popular and less supported when times are tight and policy makers are eyeing returns from commercially driven research. "That is a big mistake," says Samuel. "The best recipe for success is investing heavily in basic science. More often than not, it's going to pay off commercially – in ways we can't yet imagine."

Samuel got his PhD in psychology at Harvard University, where he founded The Music Lab and met his Canadian wife-to-be, Dr Alia Martin, a developmental cognitive scientist. The couple met as Harvard researchers, worked at the School of Psychology at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington from 2016 to 2020, and have been named rising stars by the international Association for Psychological Science – Alia in 2017 and Samuel in 2021.

After retreating to be with family in Canada during the pandemic, the couple were lured back to Aotearoa by a Rutherford Discovery Fellowship and the appointment for Samuel in the School of Psychology at Waipapa Taumata Rau. (Alia is retraining in clinical psychology at the University of Waikato.)

The \$200,000 MacDiarmid Emerging Scientist Prize recognises Samuel as a leading-edge researcher whose work will make a splash and who is effective at communicating research. Most of the money will go towards funding more research.

The Music Lab's citizen-science platform allows for gamified research projects involving millions of listeners from around the world. There you can test your 'musical IQ', check if you're tone deaf, or take part in a World Music Quiz, guessing whether a song is intended to be, say, a lullaby or for dancing.



*The 'odd phenomenon' of music is a rich area of research for Samuel Mehr.*  
Photo: Matt Crawford

The second strand to his research is traditional lab work in developmental science and auditory perception, figuring out how infant minds make sense of sounds in music and language. Inevitably, Samuel and Alia's children, Theo (6) and Eva (3), have featured as test subjects.

Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Samuel's first musical love as a child was piano and it's a matter of serendipity that he became a neuroscientist not a jobbing musician.

During his music degree at the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music, he focused on woodwinds (clarinet, flute, saxophone and oboe). In his final year, he took an elective course on cognitive development, was fascinated, and joined a Harvard research project investigating the potential effects on child cognition from participation in parent-child music classes. (Does learning music make you smarter?)

The resulting research paper, published when he was a PhD student, was entitled, 'Two randomized trials reveal no consistent evidence for non-musical cognitive benefits of brief preschool music enrichment'. It generated a media blitz with misleading headlines such as 'Academic benefits of music a myth', while Samuel's efforts to clarify included a *New York Times* op-ed explaining that only a tiny number of randomised controlled trials had tested the widespread belief in the cognitive benefits of

***"The best recipe for success is investing heavily in basic science."***

– Samuel Mehr, *The Music Lab*,  
*School of Psychology*

music lessons and that "the findings are far from conclusive".

After completing his doctorate, Samuel initiated The Music Lab at Harvard with funding from the US National Institutes of Health, moving it to Waipapa Taumata Rau and the Yale Child Study Center in 2022. It continues to prove a rich area of research.

"Music is an odd phenomenon," Samuel once said, in an interview with *Pacific Standard*.

"It's universal, it's ancient, it's an activity enjoyed by humans of all ages, and yet it's not at all clear why it exists in the first place."

■ Paul Panckhurst

*\* Note: The quote "Physics is like sex: sure, it may give some practical results, but that's not why we do it" is attributed to the bongo-playing, Nobel-prize-winning, 20th century physicist Richard Feynman, although it's not certain that he ever said it.*

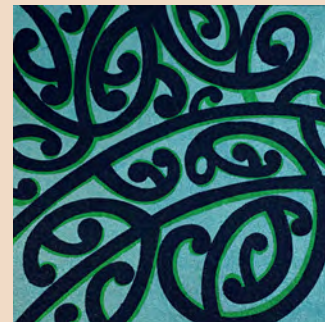


(Top) Louise Henderson. *Nude*. 1952.

(Lower left) Maureen Lander. *Te Whānau Raranga o Waitākere*. 2018.

(Lower right) Reuben Paterson. *Relax with Frankie's Whānau*. 2002. Faculty of Education Collection.

All works from the University of Auckland Art Collection.



## SIGNIFICANT ARTWORKS IN REFRESHED LIBRARY SPACES

**Works from some of New Zealand's best-known artists, including Frances Hodgkins and Colin McCahon, are now on display for everyone to enjoy on recently renovated floors of the General Library.**

Renovation work on the first and mezzanine levels of the library was completed over mid-semester break, providing new group study spaces, a new Accessible Lounge, a dedicated ReoSpace and plenty of group and casual seating. The work also included an updated curation of selected artworks from the University of Auckland Art Collection on the refurbished floors. The artworks are in a variety of media and were created by significant artists from Aotearoa New Zealand including alumna Maureen Lander, Frances Hodgkins, Louise Henderson and Colin McCahon.

A number of recent acquisitions by faculties of Arts and Fine Arts alumni are also on display, including two intricate embroideries by Areez Katki and three acrylic on canvas paintings by Ammon Ngakuru (Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāpuhi). One of the most striking is the monumental 6m x 3.5m canvas painting by Selwyn Muru (Te Aupōuri, Ngāti Kuri), that has returned to its home after an exhibition loan at the New Zealand Portrait Gallery in Wellington in 2022, and a resting period afterwards. *He Mihi ki nga Wairua Kaitiaki o te Whenua* is a site-specific painting that was commissioned during the 1990s for the wall on which it is now hanging once more.

Level one of the library now provides a home to the Mātauranga Māori and Pacific Collection, which also includes the Māori and Pacific Junior

Collection from the Sylvia Ashton-Warner Library.

The collections of the latter have been relocated to the General Library from the Faculty of Education and Social Work's former Epsom campus, as have two significant artworks. Reuben Paterson's (Ngāti Rangitīhi, Ngāi Tūhoe) dazzling glitter work, *Relax with Frankie's Whānau* (2002) is now hanging beneath three woven banner-like artworks by Alexis Neal (Ngāti Awa, Te Ātiawa), which are suspended from the ceiling near the new ReoSpace on level one.

All the artworks mentioned here are permanently on display and can be accessed by all students, staff and visitors to the General Library.

■ Madeleine Gifford, Art Collection Adviser, Te Tumu Herenga, Libraries and Learning Services



*Distinguished Alumni Mitchell Pham, Simon Phillips, Simran Kaur and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (absent, Pete Bethune). Photos: Richard Ng*

## LIFETIME CONTRIBUTION

**“Beacons to follow” was how Jack Tame described the recipients of the University’s Distinguished Alumni Awards (DAA) at the Taumata ceremony honouring the 2024 recipients.**

The broadcaster presented the Alumni Relations event, held at the ASB Waterfront Theatre on 6 April, interviewing high-achieving alumni tech entrepreneur Mitchell Pham, conservationist Pete Bethune, pioneering Māori educator Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and theatre director and artistic director Simon Phillips. The Young Alumna of the Year was financial education entrepreneur Simran Kaur, of *Girls That Invest* fame.

Linda (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou, Tuhourangi) has had a particular influence on her colleagues at the University, even today. She is recognised for her seminal work *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, which continues to shape research approaches worldwide.

Professor Yvonne Underhill-Sem, from the Faculty of Arts, says Linda’s visionary approach paved the way for meaningful progress for Indigenous academics.

“Linda embodies principled clarity in her thoughts, words and actions, exceeding even the highest expectations for tuakana-teina relations. She has consistently emphasised the need for a paradigm shift in how universities in Aotearoa New Zealand value knowledge generation from Indigenous peoples.

“Her continued commitment to scholarly and poetic writing, as well as her mentorship and research advice, exemplify her commitment to present and future generations.”

Professor Linda Waimarie Nikora (Arts) says Linda’s award, one of many over the years, is well deserved.

“In 2021, Linda was the first Māori scholar, and one of only a few New Zealanders, to be elected to the prestigious American Academy of Arts



*Linda being interviewed by Jack Tame at Taumata.*

and Sciences, and was also awarded the Royal Society Te Apārangi’s Rutherford Medal – its highest research honour.”

She says it is difficult to convey the breadth of the lifetime contribution Linda has made to Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, the Māori Centre of Research Excellence, and to research more broadly. “Her intellectual leadership has shaped the thinking of generations of scholars, not just in Aotearoa, but in the 100-plus countries inhabited by Indigenous peoples.”

Professor Melinda Webber (Faculty of Education and Social Work) emphasises Linda’s generosity of spirit and her unwavering support of Māori researchers and organisations.

“She once said a system of excellence that sucks the joy out of researchers cannot be conducive to excellence,” says Melinda.

“She said: ‘Excellence arises in a community of scholars who share each other’s visions and work, support emerging researchers and go the extra mile to make sure that they all flourish.’”

The importance of bringing people together around a common cause was a theme echoed by many of the award recipients at the Taumata ceremony, including Pete Bethune, who beamed in from his boat off the coast of Costa Rica where he and his Earthrace Conservation team were conducting patrols against illegal fishing.

“When you get to work on stuff you believe in, it’s really hard to go back to what you might consider a ‘normal job’,” says Pete. “When I look at the outstanding people who I work with, or the people I admire, they all have a cause or something they stand for, and it leads to them having a much richer life.”

**Full story: [auckland.ac.nz/tuhiwai-smith](http://auckland.ac.nz/tuhiwai-smith)  
Awards: [auckland.ac.nz/daa-2024](http://auckland.ac.nz/daa-2024)**

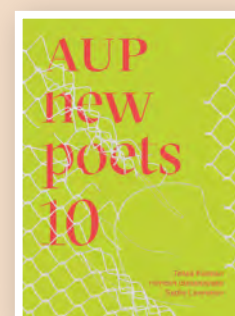


### **Environmental Defenders: Fighting for Our Natural World**

An insider’s account of how a small group of lawyers and scientists, including Auckland law alumni Andrew

Brown KC and Stephen Mills KC, under the banner of the Environmental Defence Society, took on the might of the government and development interests.

**Raewyn Peart, Bateman Books, \$80**



### **AUP New Poets 10**

Edited by award-winning author Anne Kennedy, who has held fellowships at the University of Auckland, the IIML and the University of Hawai’i, *AUP New Poets 10* features Tessa Keenan

(Te Ātiawa), romesh dissanayake and Sadie Lawrence. These three new voices explore race, indigeneity, gender, history, neurodiversity, love and loss.

**Edited and introduction by Anne Kennedy, AUP, \$30**



### **The Fatter Sex: A Battle Plan for Women’s Weight Health and Humour**

This feminist memoir of academic-turned-standup comedian Sacha Jones confronts women’s battles with diet,

weight and body confidence in modern Western societies. Sacha is a former ballet dancer, has a PhD in political theory from the University, as well as qualifications in creative writing. She has tutored at Auckland in media studies, gender politics and New Zealand politics.

**Sacha Jones, Umbilical Books, \$49**

#### **Tell us about your book**

Do you have a book you’d like to appear here? Email the details and a high-res cover image to [uninews@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:uninews@auckland.ac.nz)



*Jemaima Tiatia-Siau, Cathy Stinear,  
Te Kawehau Hoskins and Bridget Kool.  
Photo: William Chea*

## FAMILIAR SPACES

**In March a temporary sign identifying a space used by Māori students and Pacific students was described by political leaders as segregation.**

This uninformed claim resulted in real harm, including triggering abuse and death threats directed at our students and staff. While the news cycle has moved on, these events show up the need for better understanding about why such spaces exist in our University.

There are many reasons for having spaces dedicated to specific groups and activities. Some of these reasons relate to the University's rights and responsibilities under te Tiriti and various pieces of legislation. Others relate to the University's responsiveness to the diverse interests and needs of our students. It's entirely appropriate to have spaces set aside for different groups, and bathrooms organised by gender are a commonplace example. We proudly provide our community of 46,000 students with tailored facilities and support, such as parenting rooms, prayer spaces, and low-sensory environments for neurodiverse people, for example.

The University also has spaces for Māori and Pacific students, where they can freely express themselves and their cultures in an academic

setting. This is where students can find familiarity, socialise, study and connect, creating a sense of belonging that enables them to thrive. These spaces are an essential ingredient in the University's Tuākana programme, which is an education community open to all Māori and Pacific students and staff. This programme has for decades enabled Māori students and Pacific students to make the most of their opportunities during their time at University. It provides culturally tailored support that can make all the difference for their educational achievements and future opportunities.

Is it reverse racism to provide spaces for Māori and Pacific students? No. Supporting people who are disadvantaged by racism is not racism. Good-faith measures that assist those disadvantaged by discrimination are not discriminatory. This is not just morally self-evident, it's also provided for in the Bill of Rights Act and the Human Rights Act. However, a group of people receiving support is sometimes interpreted by others as a loss of something that is rightfully theirs. This sense of loss and resulting grievance indicates a misunderstanding about the differences between equality and equity.

Equality means giving everyone the same thing, without discrimination. This sounds desirable at first, until you realise that it doesn't take into account differences in people's circumstances and backgrounds, or systemic barriers that prevent people from accessing the resources,

opportunities, and life chances on offer.

Equity recognises people's individual circumstances and that fair treatment might involve different levels of support and resources to help ensure everyone has what they need to thrive. Equity also seeks to level the playing field for groups who are disadvantaged by historical injustices and ongoing contemporary problems such as racism, sexism, and ableism. Equitable policies and practices promote fairness for both individuals and communities, in ways that ultimately benefit everyone.

Providing tailored support for Māori students and Pacific students is one of many ways the University recognises the specific needs of students and promotes equitable experiences and success. We are unapologetic and unwavering in our commitment to upholding the mana of Māori and Pacific students and staff. As the University's Pro Vice-Chancellors, we are working together, with our colleagues, to create an environment of mutual respect where people can thrive with a secure sense of belonging.

■ Associate Professor Te Kawehau Hoskins, Pro Vice-Chancellor Māori; Professor Jemaima Tiatia-Siau, Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific; Professor Cathy Stinear, Pro Vice-Chancellor Equity; and Professor Bridget Kool, Pro Vice-Chancellor Education.

*The views in this article are those of the authors who support the position taken by the University on this matter.*