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UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Waipapa Taumata Rau

UniNews

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IN THE **NEWS**

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


Mark Bolland

DRUG SLASHES FRACTURE RISK

A cheap osteoporosis drug given once or twice over ten years to women aged 50 to 60 post-menopause dramatically reduces their fracture risk, Associate Professor Mark Bolland (FMHS) told the *NZ Herald*. Currently, only high-risk older women are given the drug, but the study showed the value of giving it to younger women.

Link: tinyurl.com/bolland-nzherald-fractures


Lynette Tippett

DEMENTIA'S RISING TOLL

Professor Lynette Tippett (School of Psychology) talked to RNZ's *Nights* about dementia. "The government needs to focus now because it is a really big problem we are going to be facing," she said. "By 2050 there will be 170,000 New Zealanders living with dementia. And we are not prepared."

Link: tinyurl.com/tippett-rnz-dementia


Chris Ogden

'PAX AUTOCRATICA'

Director of Global Studies Associate Professor Chris Ogden (Arts and Education) has been across the media on how Trump's leadership heralds a new 'Pax Autocratica' in geopolitics. Chris has had several pieces in *The Conversation*, which have been reprinted by others, and he has been on RNZ's *The Panel* and bFM.

Link: tinyurl.com/ogden-bfm-pax-autocratica


Melanie Kah

IMPACT OF PESTICIDES

Associate Professor Melanie Kah (School of Environment) spoke to RNZ's *Morning Report* about a world-first global study on the impact of pesticides that showed the chemicals can have detrimental impacts on non-target organisms. "This is directly questioning the sustainability of our current farming practices," said Melanie.

Link: tinyurl.com/kah-rnz-pesticides


Natasha Hamilton-Hart

NZ'S TRADE FUTURE IN A TRUMP ERA

Professor Natasha Hamilton-Hart (Business School) discussed the potential impacts of Trump's trade policies on New Zealand with the *Sunday Star-Times*. She said New Zealand had to be thinking about win-win arrangements, including trade agreements as well as more creative ideas.

Link: tinyurl.com/hamilton-hart-sst-trade


Kathy Mountjoy

MAJOR OBESITY BREAKTHROUGH

Associate Professor Kathy Mountjoy (FMHS) talked to the *NZ Herald* about a new study that reveals what regulates a gene that's pivotal to our food intake – and also our risk of obesity. Kathy, who was a co-author of the study, said the breakthrough offered a potential way of treating obesity in the general population.

Link: tinyurl.com/mountjoy-nzherald-obesity

THIS ISSUE

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FOLLOWING IN FOOTSTEPS

Drawing on her family's heritage as educators has helped Dr Suliana Mone inspire the next generation of legal minds.

Teaching was initially a 'baptism by fire' for Dr Suliana Mone, who has now been recognised for her teaching excellence. Photo: Chris Loufte

As a girl, Suliana Mone would wait outside her late father's classroom, watching him teach students in their homeland of Tonga, unaware she was staring at her future.

The law lecturer – who hails from the villages of Folaha, Fuaamotu, Nukunuku (Tongatapu), Holonga, Houma (Vava'u), Pukotala, Ha'ano and Muitoa (Ha'apai) – won Auckland Law School's Student Choice Teaching Excellence Award last semester.

"I won – little old me at Auckland Law School. I couldn't believe it when they told me," she says.

Suliana, who is now a mother of two sons, comes from a long line of educators. She was born in Fiji, while both of her parents were studying at the University of the South Pacific. The family later shifted back to Tonga, where Suliana and her siblings were raised.

She recalls the Wesleyan schools in Tonga where her father, Reverend Dr Fisi'ihoi Finau Mone, worked. Despite having limited teaching equipment, pay and other resources, he was passionately committed to his work and determined to prepare his students for the world's challenges.

In 2000, when Suliana was a teenager, her family moved again, this time to Aotearoa, where her father completed a doctorate in education at the University of Waikato. Suliana later followed in her father's footsteps, gaining bachelors and masters degrees at the University of Waikato's Te Piringa, Faculty of Law, before spreading her wings to live in Europe.

She returned to New Zealand to pursue her doctorate at Te Piringa. However, her beloved father passed away several years before she graduated, and she says it's still painful that she couldn't share the milestone with him. The loss led her to realise that the many years she spent watching and waiting for her father to finish work had provided her a teaching masterclass.

"He didn't get to see me become a lecturer. My father was everything to me. Everything I know about being an educator, I learned from watching him," she says.

Understanding that she is also descended from other educators and academics has made all the difference when lecturing hundreds of students.

"When I'm extremely anxious in front of a class I remind myself that my father and generations of educators, ministers and a great lawyer in my family are with me. I have brought them and their prayers across the ocean with me here, and I find strength in that.

"My father showed me that to educate was a privilege; that teaching had the capacity to change lives and required an absolute commitment and the very best of all your capabilities."

She also acknowledges support from other family members, including her sons, Leon and Alex; sister Sialetafa; mother Nunia; and her brothers, Mone, Leti, Sama, Sii, Nau and Sina.

Suliana took up her role two years ago at Auckland Law School, where she is also Assistant Associate Dean Moana Oceania. Her research focuses on international law, human rights, women's rights and Pacific law. She is especially focused on exploring the resistance to adopting the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in the Kingdom of Tonga.

The early-career academic's mentors have included former Labour MP and Attorney General Emeritus Professor Margaret Wilson and Professor Claire Breen of Waikato University's law faculty.

"I've been very blessed with a number of opportunities and doors opening to me in the span of my short career," she says.

"Professor Wilson was especially helpful and gave me invaluable advice on how to navigate a law faculty and teaching. There have been so many of my wonderful colleagues here at Auckland Law School who have given me so much support."

As a Pacific woman, she says the academic space has been fulfilling but challenging. Getting to grips with the finer points of teaching, she says, was a baptism by fire.

"I was giving lectures and I hadn't taught before. And at the same time, I was writing up my PhD. It hasn't been easy; I've had many sleepless nights and long hours."

However, she has drawn on encouragement and experience from colleagues.

"I found forming relationships with good people within the faculties was most helpful.

"There are very few Pacific female faces in the law faculty. I have had many young, brown females tell me in person, or who have written to me, about how encouraging and inspiring it was for them to see me as a lecturer, at the front of the class.

"They see themselves in me; the likelihood of a girl from one of the smallest Pacific Islands lecturing at the number-one law school in New Zealand is miniscule," she says.

"If I could beat the odds against me, it gives others like me the motivation and belief that they could overcome their own challenges and go even further than me."

■ Kim Meredith

Professor Richard Douglas and Dr David Waterhouse inside the clinic, named Tarāpunga.

PROFESSOR FUNDS MOBILE CLINIC

Inspired by 28th Māori battalion doctor Sir Patrick Eisdell Moore, Professor Richard Douglas has funded a mobile clinic to deliver ear, nose and throat services to remote parts of Te Tai Tokerau, Northland.

Sir Patrick saw the need for healthcare for soldiers when they returned from World War 2 and converted a caravan into a mobile clinic for the East Coast.

Richard, who is head of surgery in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences and an otorhinolaryngology (ORL) surgeon, saw a comparable need in present-day Northland for ear, nose and throat-related clinical services.

"I funded the mobile clinic because I thought it would address the need to lessen the impact of geography on access to clinical services," says Richard.

"The converted van will be deployed by staff of Health NZ in Te Tai Tokerau – ORL surgeons, specialist nurses and audiologists – to run clinics in the more distant communities in Northland."

The Mercedes van is set up with the latest technology, so clinicians on board can access patient notes and perform assessments and most procedures on-site.

"I hope it will be able to service these communities sufficiently frequently that the need for patients to drive to Whangārei Hospital will be greatly reduced.

"A better provision of ORL diagnostic services to these communities should lead to earlier diagnoses and better outcomes."

Richard designed the mobile van with Whangārei ORL surgeon Dr David Waterhouse.

They are pleased that patients who live in isolated parts of Northland will know the van will visit their area on an eight-week cycle.

The mobile clinic – which is named Tarāpunga, after the native red-billed gull – will have its ongoing operating costs covered by the Tarāpunga Trust, which has also been set up by Richard.

"If we can get the model working well in Te Tai Tokerau, I would like to see similar mobile clinics deployed in other parts of New Zealand with geographically remote communities," he says.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/mobile-ent-clinic

FRESH INSIGHTS ON **GETTING KIDS BACK INTO CLASS**

Students are more motivated to attend school when they are less tired and stressed, have positive relationships with their friends and teachers, and learn things that align with their aspirations, a new report has found.

Turning up at school is a major factor in student achievement, but young people in New Zealand are attending less now than in the previous decade. And although absenteeism is a worldwide issue, attendance rates in Aotearoa appear to have had a steeper decline here over the past ten years compared with Australia and the UK.

The report, produced by University of Auckland researchers, looked at the barriers and incentives to school attendance.

It drew on information from around 1,000 13-year-olds who are part of the Growing Up in New Zealand longitudinal study, New Zealand's largest, ongoing cohort study.

Dr Georgia Rudd, a research fellow in social and community health from the Faculty of Arts and Education and one of the report's authors, says preventing absenteeism is a complex issue. Including those most affected – the students themselves – in the conversation is invaluable.

"Our findings highlight that the roughly 1,000 young people (aged 13) who responded to our questions about school, as well as other areas of their lives for our wider project, are motivated or put off attending for different reasons from what their parents, educators and policymakers might assume, for example."

As well as harder factors to influence such as individual and family circumstances, findings suggest efforts to improve school attendance should focus on internal factors within the education system itself, says Georgia.

The relevance of the curriculum to the requirements of adult life and future careers, and how the school day is structured to reflect that, will impact attendance, she says. Fostering school environments that help young people build meaningful connections with each other, their teachers, and their learning will also have an impact.

Dr Georgia Rudd. *Photo: William Chea*

She says the researchers found most young people felt positive about school, valued learning and recognised its importance.

Respondents also felt an obligation to attend school, but not just because of the legal requirement to do so.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/school-attendance

NEW LABORATORY AT LEIGH

The new Dr Anneliese Schuler Aquaria Laboratory at Leigh is pictured in the foreground.

The University's Leigh Marine Laboratory recently unveiled state-of-the-art aquaria, which are set to significantly enhance marine research capabilities.

The multimillion-dollar Dr Anneliese Schuler Aquaria Laboratory was officially opened with a dedication ceremony on 31 January. The facility, named in honour of philanthropist Dr Beate Schuler's mother, was previously blessed by mana whenua Ngāti Manuhiri, a partner in Hauraki Gulf restoration efforts.

The cutting-edge laboratory allows scientists to precisely control temperature, light and noise, facilitating advanced research into animal and plant physiology, aquaculture, and the impacts of microplastics, ocean warming, low oxygen zones, and noise pollution on marine life and ecosystems.

Professor Conrad Pilditch, head of the Institute of Marine Science, says the facility represents a significant advancement in the institute's ability to understand ocean life and address the impacts of various stressors.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/aquaria-lab

STUDY SUPPORTS CHANGES TO BLOOD DONOR POLICY

FMHS Associate Professor Peter Saxton
Photo: Chris Loufte

Findings from a study led by Associate Professor Peter Saxton were instrumental in recent changes announced to blood donation processes, making them more inclusive.

In late January, the New Zealand Blood Service announced Medsafe had approved its application to introduce individual donor assessment, moving away from a blanket ban that effectively excluded most gay and bisexual men from donating blood.

The HRC-funded Sex and Prevention of Transmission Study (SPOTS) – which is focused on sex between men, HIV prevention and blood donation – found only 13 percent of gay, bisexual, takatāpui and other men who have sex with men were eligible to give blood under incumbent rules.

However, SPOTS investigators estimated that if New Zealand adopted individual donor assessments, as are done in the UK or Canada, the rate would rise to 41 percent.

They also found no confirmed cases of undiagnosed HIV among study participants providing dried blood spots.

Delegates at a SPOTS Symposium held in late January heard that findings from the study had reassured decision-makers that a more inclusive policy would lead to both better blood self-sufficiency for New Zealand and be safe for recipients.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/spots-blood-donation

UNIVERSITY APPOINTED SDG 8 HUB CHAIR

Vice-Chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater

The University of Auckland was recently appointed to lead global and national initiatives to support inclusive economic development and fair work.

In late January, the University was appointed Chair for the United Nations Academic Impact Hub (UNAI) on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth.

Through this role, the University will lead the advancement of research, innovation, education and collaboration to promote inclusive economic development and fair employment practices.

SDG 8 is central to building a sustainable future, emphasising the need for productive employment, entrepreneurial opportunities, and equitable economic growth that benefits all.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Dawn Freshwater says the appointment reflects the University's sustainability and global development leadership.

"As the Chair for SDG 8, the University will contribute to shaping solutions that ensure economic growth is not only robust but also inclusive, equitable and sustainable."

The UNAI has more than 1,600 member institutions in more than 150 countries that reach about 25 million people in education and research sectors around the world.

As the Chair for SDG 8, the University will lead a global community, offering a significant opportunity to bring together thought leaders from around the world to turn ideas into action and share best practices through webinars, conferences and collaborative projects.

Full story: auckland.ac.nz/chair-sdg8-hub

Making new discoveries is thrilling, says Dr Jessie Jacobsen, but it pales in comparison to seeing the human impact of research. *Photo: Chris Loufte*

JESSIE JACOBSEN: SEEKING ANSWERS FOR AUTISM

The insights gained from a genetic diagnosis of autism can be transformative for children and their families, says the scientist helming New Zealand's first autism research clinic.

Dr Jessie Jacobsen isn't seeking to cure autism.

Instead, the neuroscientist is focused on helping Kiwi kids with neurodevelopmental conditions pinpoint a possible underlying genetic cause.

Over the past decade, Jessie and her team have provided genetic diagnoses for more than 100 people who would otherwise never know the cause of their condition.

This is set to rise with the launch of New Zealand's first dedicated Autism Research Clinic at the Centre for Brain Research, with Jessie at its helm.

"When you have an answer, it can have a really immediate and profound impact on a family and their life course," says Jessie. "It can range from reassurance that a condition is real to, in some cases, helping inform life-saving treatment options."

> ***"We just want to help give these kids the best possible start in life."***
>
> ***– Dr Jessie Jacobsen, Faculty of Science***

The clinic will use the groundbreaking genome-wide sequencing capabilities at the Centre for Brain Research and build on the Minds for Minds project – a decade-long study into the DNA variations of autism and neurodevelopmental conditions, led by Jessie and a multidisciplinary team of researchers, clinicians and community members.

The clinic will initially work with children and will combine genetic testing with follow-up support and clinical management, carried out in close collaboration with hospitals and clinicians.

With an estimated two to three percent of the New Zealand population autistic, and increased awareness and diagnoses seeing cases rise, the clinic arrives at a crucial time. Using genome-wide approaches to provide precise diagnoses for autism is relatively recent and isn't routinely funded in New Zealand's public health system.

"The demand from families is huge," says Jessie, who in 2007 was named the MacDiarmid Young Scientist of the Year; in 2010 the University's Young Alumna of the Year; and in 2013 received a Rutherford Discovery Fellowship. In 2007, she was also shortlisted for New Zealander of the Year.

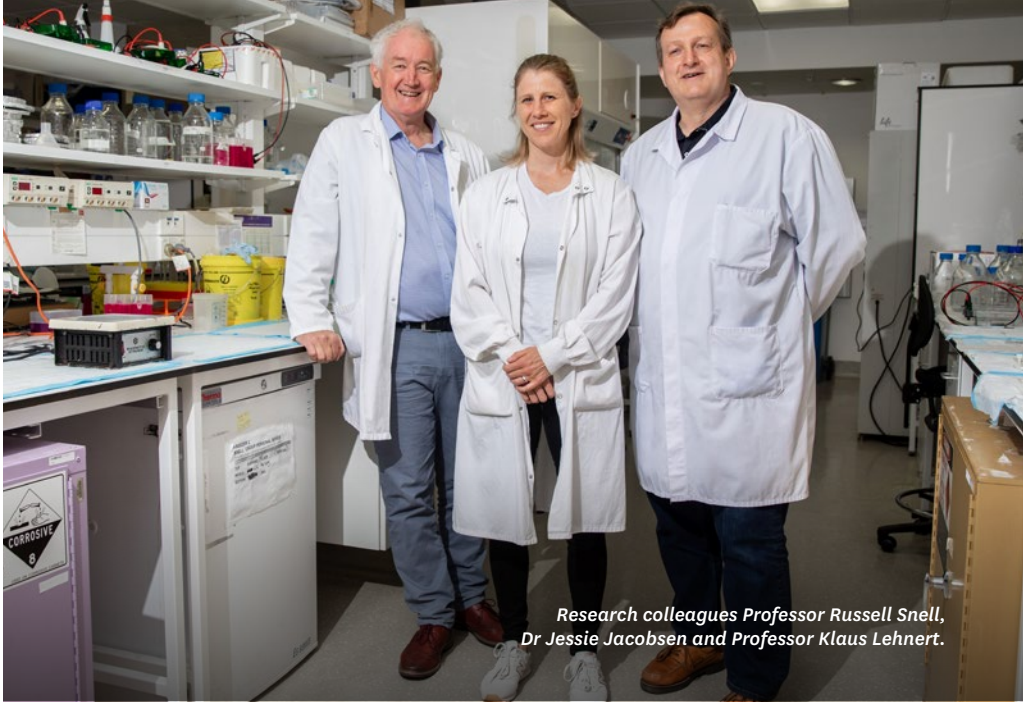
"Autism is incredibly complex and will often overlap with other conditions, which genetic sequencing can help us to understand," she says.

"For some individuals, particularly those with high support needs, identifying a change in a specific gene can reveal increased risks for other co-occurring conditions. They can then go into early management and have proactive screening.

"One recent case revealed a change in a gene associated with the development of benign tumours, so now that individual has regular check-ups for it. That kind of proactive outcome is quite amazing."

Not every family with an autistic individual wants to go down the DNA track, says Jessie.

"But for those who do, it can be really transformative. We just want to help give these kids the best possible start in life, and that might mean supporting their strengths, as well as the difficulties they might face."



Research colleagues Professor Russell Snell, Dr Jessie Jacobsen and Professor Klaus Lehnert.

The path to discovery

Gene discovery is poised to transform how neurodevelopmental conditions are diagnosed and managed, and Jessie is perfectly placed to lead its introduction in New Zealand.

A relatively early-career researcher, Jessie made her first major contribution to genomics as a PhD student aged only in her 20s. Working alongside Professor Russell Snell and Distinguished Professor Sir Richard Faull, she was part of the team that successfully created a sheep model of the fatal brain disorder Huntington's disease.

It was a technique that had previously only been achieved in small animals, such as rodents. However, a sheep brain is remarkably similar to the human brain, explains Jessie and, crucially, sheep live longer than rodents, so the technique has enabled researchers to discover more about the progression of the disease before symptoms appear. This has paved the way for the development of targeted treatments.

"I remember running down the hallway in my lab coat to see Richard. We both thought 'oh my gosh, this has worked, this could really make a difference'. That moment is seared in my mind.

"We spent a long time trying to generate an accurate and useful model of Huntington's disease. It was such a hard-fought PhD, but so worthwhile in the end. That kind of work is immensely satisfying."

Then, like so many talented Kiwis with the potential to shape the future, she left our shores. Her relocation to Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital eventually worked in our favour, however, when she made the decision to return home after working in a lab at the forefront of her field.

In the US, Jessie joined a centre that was at the vanguard of a revolution in genetic research and DNA sequencing in the late 2000s.

The team was conducting groundbreaking studies in medical genetics, autism, and rare genetic disorders.

"There I was at this amazing genetics centre right in the middle of it all," recalls Jessie.

"Massive parallel sequencing took off, and costs were coming down, making a genetic diagnosis for rare and complex conditions much more accessible."

At the beginning of the 2000s, the cost of sequencing a human genome was about $1 million; today it sits at just over $1,000.

"It was an incredibly exciting time and it gave me the confidence to come back and say, 'we need to be offering this in New Zealand'."

The human impact of research

Jessie's time in the US was funded by the Neurological Foundation of New Zealand's prestigious Philip Wrightson Fellowship. When she decided to return home, the Foundation supported her with a repatriation fellowship.

She also received a Rutherford Discovery Fellowship, helping her to build up the Minds for Minds network and, notably, identifying several causative variations in genes for neurodevelopmental conditions, including autism.

That breakthrough came as a result of a landmark study involving 201 autistic individuals, which found almost 13 percent had a clearly identified genetic variant, while an additional 16 percent had a DNA change that likely explained their autism.

The findings have attracted international attention, however Jessie quickly points out the collaborative effort behind the work (Professor Snell and Professor Klaus Lehnert have been mainstays of her research team).

The team, she says, adheres to rigorous ethical standards.

"Being given access to a person's genetic data is a privilege. We've developed protocols alongside clinical geneticists trained in delivering genetic information to families."

And while she admits making new discoveries is thrilling, Jessie says it pales in comparison to seeing the human impact of research – an ethos heavily influenced by the altruistic nature of her parents.

Both teachers, Jessie's parents were great believers in the power of education to transform lives. Her mother taught English as a second language, and helped to resettle Vietnamese refugees. Her father worked with students with diverse learning needs at Pakuranga College (where Jessie was head girl).

"He would have worked with autistic individuals with high support needs, but at the time many were broadly characterised as having profound learning difficulties," she says, adding that our understanding of autism is now far more nuanced.

"There's a saying that, if you've met one autistic individual you've met one autistic individual," says Jessie.

"It presents uniquely in every person, with support needs varying depending on an individual's skills and interests.

"It's about embracing that neurodiversity while providing an accurate diagnosis to support an individual to contribute to, and be a part of our community that, unfortunately, can expect everyone to conform in the same way."

Jessie expects that in five years, with sufficient funding, the Autism Research Clinic will be able to meet the demand for genetic diagnoses for autism across New Zealand. Generous support from the Freemasons Foundation helped fund the initial stages of the clinic.

"I'd love to involve more adults in genetic testing. Many people have grown up thinking they didn't quite fit in but now suspect they may have autism.

"The plan is to really reach further into the community to bring world class research and informed diagnosis to the people of Aotearoa."

■ Danelle Clayton

> ***"It was an incredibly exciting time and it gave me the confidence to come back and say, 'we need to be offering this in New Zealand'."***
>
> ***– Dr Jessie Jacobsen***

Leadership runs in the family of activist and Auckland Law School academic Eru Kapa-Kingi. *Photos: Chris Loufte*

ERU KAPA-KINGI: A POLITICAL FIGURE

Toitū te Tiriti spokesperson Eru Kapa-Kingi helmed one of the biggest public demonstrations in recent New Zealand history. And the Auckland Law School professional teaching fellow is determined to continue driving political change in his own way.

As the early morning sun cast long shadows over the Far North town of Te Kao, hundreds prepared to embark on a hīkoi that would stretch over nine days, culminating at the steps of Parliament.

Their mission was clear: to challenge the Treaty Principles Bill and uphold the mana of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Leading them was Eru Kapa-Kingi, an emerging leader in te ao Māori. At age 28, the law academic and activist ultimately mobilised one of the largest public demonstrations in New Zealand's recent history. But for Eru, of Ngāpuhi and Te Aupōuri descent, this was more than political activism – it was an act of whakapapa, a reclamation of identity and duty.

"Protecting the tapu, the mana, the integrity of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is something that's closely aligned with my purpose and my identity," he says.

"It's tied to my journey of reclaiming my reo, my connections to who I am, to my iwi, Te Aupōuri and Ngāpuhi. I've come to see just where I fit in that puzzle in the matrix of te ao Māori.

"Te Tiriti and He Whakaputanga [the 1835 declaration of independence], and the kōrero that surrounds them, I'm drawn to it on more than an academic level."

That journey began in the lecture halls of Victoria University where Eru graduated with a conjoint law and arts (te reo Māori) degree with honours, and later continued at Waipapa Taumata Rau. In 2023 he joined Auckland Law School as a professional teaching fellow, where he designs and teaches compulsory courses on te ao Māori me ōna tikanga (the Māori world and its cultural practices).

The Kapa-Kingi name is well-known in the political sphere. His mother, Mariameno Kapa-Kingi, is the MP for Te Tai Tokerau and is a mentor and someone he deeply respects. Given this, Eru was once drawn to follow in her

footsteps, but his participation in the hīkoi shifted his perspective.

"Before the hīkoi, I'd been thinking on a lot of things, reading, writing and comparing the lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. It started to challenge my thinking around what it means to be political and what it means to be a politician."

As Eru pondered the legacies of these two US civil rights leaders, he came across an author who argued that they were the greatest unelected politicians of their time.

"Reflecting on my own history, I thought of Dame Whina Cooper, and I could say the same thing about her – she was one of the most influential unelected politicians of her generation."

After the hīkoi, these insights solidified for Eru, who says: "You don't have to be an MP to create change – and not being disparaging of my mum as an MP, there's definite influence to be made there, but that's not the be-all and end-all of being political.

"The strength of being political outside of that Pākehā paradigm is exactly that – being outside of that paradigm. We can reclaim what it means to be political as Māori."

A family of leaders

For Eru, leadership is woven into whānau. As one of a set of triplets, he has never walked his journey alone. His brothers, Heemi and Tipene, are just as deeply committed to the kaupapa.

Heemi is a clinical psychologist at the University of Auckland's Faculty of Science and a board member for Te Kōhao Health, a kaupapa Māori health organisation. Tipene, with a background in accounting and consulting, now serves as the CEO of Te Aupōuri.

Despite their different professions, they share a purpose to uplift the mana of Māori.

"I've always had them. They're my mates, people who have my back," says Eru. "Even though we've arrived in different places, we've taken the same journey together. We are all geared towards the same ideals, but we have distinguishable skill sets. We've all just naturally landed where we have."

Their vision was on display at Waitangi 2025, where the triplets and their cousin Ngāhuia Harawira organised and facilitated a four-day forum that brought together influential voices, including academics, community leaders, politicians and rangatahi.

Discussions ranged from Indigenous economics to hauora Māori, tangata Tiriti and tangata Moana perspectives, story sovereignty, and what it means to be Māori and political. The forum also welcomed Indigenous delegations from countries including Tahiti and Canada.

During the Waitangi Day pōwhiri for Parliamentarians, Eru took a stand. As politicians made their entrance, he led a separate haka. He says it was a direct challenge, that sent an unambiguous message: 'You are not welcome here'. The act was not symbolic; it was a deliberate response to the voices of the hapū within his iwi, Ngāpuhi, who he says made it clear that certain politicians should not attend, following a year of what they felt were attacks on Māori rights and sovereignty.

"A necessary part of change is challenge. To stand with the many who want change and lay that challenge was an honour, and hopefully something that future generations can look to as an example."

"Protecting the tapu, the mana, the integrity of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is something that's closely aligned with my purpose and my identity."

– Eru Kapa-Kingi

For Eru and his brothers, this was part of a much larger movement that reclaims space, challenges systems, and reminds Aotearoa that Te Tiriti o Waitangi is not just a historical document, but a living covenant that shapes the future.

Another key figure in Eru's journey is Te Tai Tokerau leader and activist Hone Harawira. A former University of Auckland student, he played a crucial role in activism with Ngā Tamatoa and the Polynesian Panthers – movements that challenged systemic injustices in Aotearoa.

"My uncle Hone Harawira has played a big role, even though at times he gives me advice I never asked for," laughs Eru.

"Often, it is the advice that I probably needed. I'm glad we have that kind of relationship."

The responsibility of fatherhood

Beyond his academic and political pursuits, Eru is a partner and father – roles that have given him a deeper perspective. His son, nearing his first birthday, has provided him with a renewed sense of purpose.

"It's funny how that changes your world. Fatherhood gives me a greater sense of focus in terms of drive. But I also need to balance all of my mahi with being a present pāpā," he says.

"Before he was born, there was this kind of amorphous thing I was striving toward, and then that amorphous thing grew legs and arms and a head. Now he lives with me, and he's cute."

Eru also holds a strong belief that while kaupapa is important, the most important kaupapa is whānau.

"Whānau is what makes us Māori; we exist as a culture and a people because of each other. Whānau is also spiritually important because they keep us grounded in Te Ao Mārama."

Decolonising the law and academia

For Eru, academia is not just a career path but an opportunity for transformation. He sees universities as central to the colonial project in Aotearoa and believes they have a responsibility to undo its damage.

"We need to start realising that universities were one of the primary tools of colonisation in Aotearoa, replacing Māori philosophy, Māori ways of thinking, speaking and acting.

"That places an obligation on academics today to really contribute to the deeper, longer-term decolonisation project," he says.

"And it's not just an academic topic but a lived reality. It should be a daily practice that all people in Aotearoa contribute to.

"My goal in life is to close the gaps between the wonderful theories of Māori independence and the minds of my people, no matter what reality they come from. To take kōrero to the dinner table, to the hāngi pit, to the marae, to the dairy down the road, to the staff smoko room. The journey of liberation must include all strands of te iwi Māori, and indeed Aotearoa generally."

■ Te Rina Triponel

TUNING INTO **LEADING RESEARCH STORIES**

Ingenious, a podcast telling stories of game-changing research from the University, is launched this month. *UniNews* talks with its host, Nikki Mandow.

Senior lecturer in Dance Studies Dr Tia Reihana features in an episode on dance and social inclusion.
Photo: Maddie Daybell Photography

Is space junk out of control? How can digital twins help our health? How many neural networks are activated when we dance together? Could a 2,500-year-old idea from ancient Athens fix our democracy?

These are some of the questions canvassed in a five-part University of Auckland research podcast debuting on podcast networks.

Ingenious is the University's latest investment in premium storytelling about research that makes a difference.

The podcast covers ideas and topics of local and international interest where the University is playing a leading role in research. The pilot season includes sustainability in space, dance and social inclusion, the role of citizens' assemblies in democracy, and digital twins (think the next-generation of crash test dummies that are revolutionising healthcare).

Nikki Mandow is the inaugural presenter. A former journalist and podcast host with RNZ and *Newsroom*, she says when she started working in the University's research communications team a little over a year ago she was excited to showcase the amazing research going on.

"I'm a huge podcast fan; I listen to podcasts that expand my horizons, and tell me interesting and often unexpected stories about what's going on in the world," says Nikki.

"I thought podcasts would be a perfect medium to explore what researchers at the University were doing here, and the impact of that research on the wider world."

The first in the series looks at lactose intolerance and why two-thirds of people globally find it hard to digest milk.

"When I started working on the podcast, I hadn't realised a random gene mutation that appeared in some parts of the world, including Northwestern Europe, around 5,000 years ago, means some of us retain the ability to digest lactose after we are weaned," she says.

"But most New Zealanders of Māori, Pacific, Asian, South American or African heritage are likely to be lactose intolerant. Milk really isn't that great for them.

"There's really interesting work going on at Waipapa Taumata Rau about the science behind lactose, and wider milk intolerance and what we might do about it."

The popularity of podcasts is on the rise in New Zealand. Statistics from NZ on Air show podcast audiences grew from seven percent of the population in 2018 to 18 percent last year. Among people who are young (15-39 years old), work in creative, professional, and higher-paid jobs, live in Auckland, or are Māori, the figure is closer to 25 percent.

"Our students are listening to podcasts, as are our academics and alumni. *Ingenious* is another way for them to find out about the game-changing research happening at their University."

Longer term, the plan is to develop a podcast stable for the University, bringing together other faculty podcasts.

The first episode of *Ingenious* launches in the week beginning 3 March, with subsequent episodes released fortnightly through March and April.

It will be available on major podcast platforms, including Apple and Spotify.

Associate Professor Ngarino Ellis and Professor Deidre Brown

OCKHAMS KICK OFF

Five books from Auckland University Press have been longlisted in the 2025 Ockham New Zealand Book Awards for 2025.

Among them are *Toi Te Mana: An Indigenous History of Māori Art*, written by the University's Associate Professor Ngarino Ellis and Professor Deidre Brown, with the late Professor Jonathan Mane-Wheoki. The landmark publication, which featured on the cover of the December 2024 issue of *UniNews*, spans more than 600 pages and is also a finalist in the BookHub Award for Illustrated Non-Fiction.

AUP titles *A Different Light: First Photographs of Aotearoa*, edited by alumni Catherine Hammond and Shaun Higgins, and *Sight Lines: Women and Art in Aotearoa*, by Kirsty Baker have also been longlisted in the category.

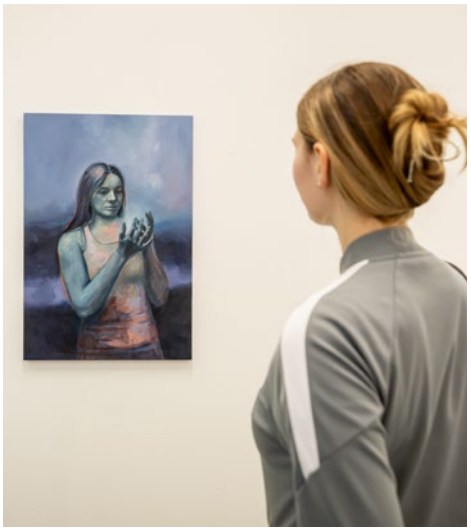
Emeritus Professor of English C.K. Stead's *In the Half Light of a Dying Day* has been longlisted for the Mary and Peter Biggs Award for Poetry, as has AUP title *Hopurangi -Songcatcher: Poems from the Maramataka*, by Robert Sullivan.

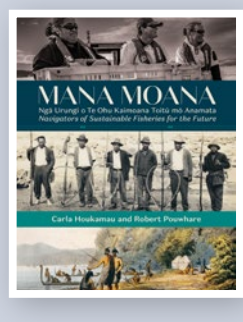
The awards' shortlist is announced in early March, and the winners on 14 May during the Auckland Writers Festival.

IN THE **FRAME**

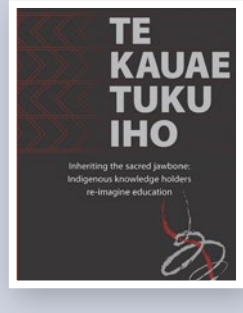
The work of Elam's graduating students was on show at the fine arts school's studios for two days in late November as part of the annual Elam Grad Show (pictured).

But if you couldn't get to the show, don't worry – you can visit Elam's online portfolio of work and creative practice research from graduating Elam students. The Elam Artists digital platform includes more than 450 contemporary art projects from students who graduated between 2015 and 2024.
Visit: elamartists.ac.nz

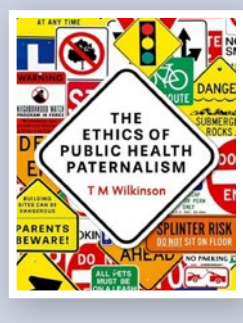




Mana Moana
Dr Carla Houkamau and Dr Robert Pouwhare (Business and Economics) canvass Māori fisheries in Aotearoa. This book weaves history, mātauranga, business and politics to offer insights into this major sector of Māori business.
Carla Houkamau and Robert Pouwhare, Auckland University Press, $50



Te Kauae Tuku Iho: Inheriting the Sacred Jawbone
Dr Maia Hetaraka (Arts and Education) explores what educational success might look like for Māori, with her research based on consultation with knowledgeable kaumātua, who identify crucial areas for transformation.
Maia Hetaraka, New Zealand Council for Educational Research Press, $50



The Ethics of Public Health Paternalism
Professor Martin Wilkinson (Politics and International Relations) investigates public health measures, asking whether policies aimed at making us healthier also make us happier, and to what extent they infringe on personal autonomy.
T M Wilkinson, Oxford University Press, Free to access

Weaponizing Civilian Protection
Conflict expert Dr Thomas Gregory (Politics and International Relations) draws on declassified documents and interviews with officials to explore how civilian protection can enable and excuse civilian harm inflicted in wars.
Thomas Gregory, Oxford University Press, $262

CURIOUS AND CREATIVE

Entering the Makerspace, part of the University's Kura Matahuna – Unleash Space, is like pulling up at a grown-up's version of a kid's crafting table.

Full of intriguing machines – like laser and vinyl cutters, 3D printers, soldering equipment and sewing machines – and materials (it's a haberdashery nerd's paradise), you can't help but want to get creative.

That's totally the idea, says technology and prototyping manager Sean Kelly (pictured top left), who oversees the Makerspace, run by the Business School's Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. The Makerspace aims to spark 'playful curiosity' and is open to students and staff, whether they want to prototype a product or polish off a project.

Helping out is a team of 'creative technologists' – students who are employed to assist people using the space, getting them up to speed with the equipment and otherwise offering their skills and ideas.

Prior to starting at Unleash Space, Sean worked in the nascent makerspace sector at a community technology library called Do Space in Omaha, Nebraska. On his way out of the US, after his work visa expired, he spotted an ad for a role at Unleash Space, which was then in development.

Originally from Geelong, Sean had never been to New Zealand, but applied immediately, and after winning the role was initially involved with setting up the hub before it opened in 2017.

It's a busy place – supporting curricula, as well as extracurricular activities for staff and students and visiting groups from outside the University – but a joy of the job, says Sean, is there's always time to learn something new.

What do you enjoy about working in the Makerspace?

One of the principles of the Makerspace is 'playful curiosity'. It's a space for students to simply be curious and creative, regardless of their discipline or their faculty, and pursue their creative interests. So, you end up seeing a very wide variety of skills, projects and talents.

It's very organic in that you have this creative playground where students collide with each other, make cool stuff and, by osmosis, you end up learning all about what they're doing. A lot of the things that I've learned, especially technically, have come from my own students. The collective knowledge that we've developed here is pretty big.

What's something in the space you particularly like using?

It has to be the 3D printers. The technology has developed in leaps and bounds over the past seven years, and the printers are now faster, more reliable and more efficient. As a result, almost anything that you print impresses someone.

What's one of the most interesting things that you've printed?

It was a few years ago now, but I did 3D print a working violin (pictured above) from an open-source model. And if I wanted to print it now, I know it would be a lot better because the models have improved and the printing would be faster, stronger and use better material.

If the technology is always evolving, are you constantly buying new equipment?

The nature of the Makerspace is to be very open, with low barriers to entry, so another important feature is to keep the equipment, whether it's digital or analogue, fairly low risk, robust and desktop size.

So a lot of what we have here from when we opened is still very relevant. We have a lot of the same sewing machines, for example, that we had seven years ago.

On the other hand, we have upgraded some of our 3D printers because printing just keeps giving us new efficiency gains.

What types of equipment do students use most often in the space?

Everything is well used, but probably the most used are the laser cutter and the 3D printers. They get quick results, so there's a lot of demand for those.

It can be a bit daunting to give some of these things a go, so another of our principles is 'technology enablement and empowerment'. You can come into the space and be trained, and when you know what it's about, then that might inspire you to pursue the third pillar, which is 'prototyping and innovation'.

If you want to visualise an idea or a solution, or you're working on a start-up venture and need a prototype, you can do that here.

In a makerspace, the equipment doesn't activate itself; there has to be a team behind it. The breadth of skills that the creative technologists have is great, including their expertise in prototyping. We're always trying to save people time and money, and ensure they don't jump too far into a project before considering design. Again, it's about lowering those barriers to making something – empowering the making movement.

■ Caitlin Sykes

Online orientation is required to access the Makerspace as is training for some equipment. For more information, visit: cie. auckland.ac.nz/locations/unleash-space/