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Front cover: Wai-Ora, the University's new
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Tēnā koutou katoa

One of the things that struck me when I
returned to Otago two years ago was the scale
and reach of the research being undertaken by
our staff and students.

Every day, our people are at the forefront
of discoveries that are changing our world
and the lives of people for the better. In
2025, we had a record year for generating
external research income, with \$244 million
brought in by our teams. In this issue of
the *University of Otago Magazine*, you can
read about the work of Associate Professor
Andrew Reynolds, Dr Rose Crossin and Dr
Thomas Mattern, just three examples of our
world-class research.

That research is the bedrock of what
it is to be a university, and to provide
the environment of academic excellence
in which our students learn. This is a
very challenging and uncertain time for
researchers, with available funding reducing
and significant restructuring of the research
system underway.

In this environment, having one of our
most decorated researchers, Distinguished
Professor Greg Cook return to Otago as
the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research
and Innovation) is most welcome. Greg
brings huge experience and energy to his
role, and is focused not only on supporting
our researchers in their core foundational
work, but also on how the University can

play its part in mission-led research to lift
our economy and society and unlock the
innovation opportunities that we hold.

Another recent significant appointment
to the University is the inaugural holder of
the position of Pou Tiriti, Dr Megan Pōtiki.
Megan's role, working with Deputy Vice-
Chancellor (Māori), Distinguished Professor
Jacinta Ruru, is to lead the University in
its Te Tiriti journey, in particular putting
actions into place to enable our mana-to-
mana agreement with mana whenua to take
flight.

As we welcome new staff, we also
farewell others. One of our most cited
researchers, Professor Philippa Howden-
Chapman, has retired after more than 40
years working at the University of Otago,
Wellington. Philippa's work on healthy
housing and sustainable cities is world-class.

The University continues to search
for new ways to sustainably grow. In
Queenstown, developments continue
on multiple fronts, with the Master in
Digital Technology and Bachelor of
Entrepreneurship on track for delivery in
2027, executive education and short-course
programmes being delivered, and work at

"In a globally unstable world where
many of the values that we cherish
are under threat, there has never
been a time where the work of
universities matters more."

the magnificent Hākitekura property well-
advanced. While Dunedin will always be our
home, the opportunities in the Queenstown
Lakes area are significant, and an important
part of serving the Otago region.

Among many highlights this year we
have seen both a rise in enrolments and
excellent results in the global QS rankings
for our subjects. Four University of Otago
subjects have been ranked in the top 50
globally, sports-related subjects (including
physiotherapy) 22nd, anatomy and physiology
36th, dentistry 50th, and hospitality and
leisure management 50th. These subjects are
also ranked 1st in Aotearoa New Zealand.
Otago has a further 13 subjects in the top
200 in the world.

Looking ahead, we will celebrate the
opening of our new building in Christchurch,
Wai-Ora. This is a state-of-the-art facility
that will house many of our researchers,
teaching staff and students. There is also
space for other organisations and businesses
to work in the facility and grow our
collaboration with the health and research
sectors in Christchurch.

We continue to highly value the interests
of our alumni and supporters in all that we



Photo: Dave Bull

do. In a globally unstable world where many
of the values that we cherish are under
threat, there has never been a time where
the work of universities matters more.
We do need your continued help and support
to make sure we are playing our part in
building a better world and helping shape
the people who will lead us into the future.
We are always keen to talk about how we
can work together to build our University
and the opportunities we can create.

Noho ora mai,



Hon. Grant Robertson
Vice-Chancellor

DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR GREG COOK: “The other greatest thing that’s ever happened is being given this role as DVC. It’s the most perfect job I could have, helping the University of Otago do world-leading research.”

Returning to Otago and his “perfect job”

In October 2025, Otago welcomed back Distinguished Professor Greg Cook, who brings his passion for discovery to the institution as its new Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

IT IS A TIME OF INTERNATIONAL UPHEAVAL AND REDUCED RESEARCH SPENDING, but Distinguished Professor Greg Cook is upbeat and enthusiastic about his new role as Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) (Research and Innovation) and the future of research at Otago.

Cook returned to Dunedin late last year to tackle what could be one of the most challenging tasks at the University — helping Otago’s researchers navigate a substantially changed Science, Innovation and Technology research funding ecosystem.

The combination of reduced funding and escalating system pressures requires all universities to adapt quickly to a new research environment with new priorities.

“Otago has the capability to respond strongly,” Cook says. “Our researchers are world leading, but the metrics of success have changed. To remain competitive, we must recalibrate our research focus toward strategic alignment, mission relevance, and demonstrable impact.

“There are lots of reasons to remain positive. Otago could be the shining beacon that leads the way in this new funding research system.

“Early-career researchers are particularly well suited to this rapidly evolving research environment. They bring energy, adaptability, a willingness to engage with new challenges, and represent the next generation of Otago research leaders. Our more established researchers are already showing what their experience can do, last year bringing in record external funding. The University of Otago is well placed for the future.”

Cook spent more than two decades in Otago’s Department of Microbiology and Immunology, building a stellar international reputation and gaining academic accolades — from an Early Career Award for Distinction in Research in 2004, to a personal Chair,

medals and group awards to Distinguished Professor and now DVC (Research and Innovation).

“This role is an honour and a privilege,” he says. “It’s also a massive challenge. While my background is in science, the humanities, social sciences and commerce are fundamental to the University’s success — contributing not only to global rankings but to the broader cultural, social and economic value we create.

“The breadth of the University’s research demands effective representation across all disciplines, particularly as funding pressures intensify. We now need to recalibrate our approach in response to a system that places greater emphasis on research with measurable economic impact. This is a large step change for Otago, something we have never been tasked with doing in our history.”

Much of Cook’s scientific research did offer commercial opportunities, including investigating biomedical platforms to develop drugs able to tackle such things as tuberculosis in humans and methane production in agriculture.

Before his current role, Cook was at the Queensland University of Technology as Biomedical Sciences Head of School and Principal Investigator at the Translational Research Institute.

“My experience at QUT has equipped me to be more effective at bridging research and commercialisation, ensuring that discoveries are translated into real-world impact.

“At QUT, discovery and commercialisation are fully integrated, frequently occurring within the same laboratory environment. This model is enabled by targeted government incentives and funding, and by deep industry and pharmaceutical sector engagement in academic research.

“New Zealand is moving to strengthen its intellectual property framework, but uncertainty around funding for these

initiatives creates challenges for building a similarly effective commercialisation ecosystem.

“Fortunately, I’ve had a commercialisation focus for most of my career so I can speak from experience, and I still maintain an active research programme. I’m applying for grants like everyone else so we can learn together to navigate this new research system.

“Engaging more deeply with our alumni and the private sector will be essential in bridging the gap between research and commercial applications.

“Otago could be the shining beacon that leads the way in this new funding research system.”

“Developing robust commercialisation strategies in collaboration with these stakeholders will be a vital step toward this goal. I see this as crucial to driving the University’s future success in research, innovation and impact.”

Cook cautions that while new opportunities are attractive, long-established strengths built over decades must not be neglected. Long-term research programmes are more likely to yield transformative outcomes, including discoveries of Nobel Prize calibre, than short-term, impact-driven projects.

Academics should have the freedom to pursue their own intellectual interests without undue constraint, Cook says. Regardless of the political context, there remains a strong view that at least 20 per cent of academic research effort should be dedicated to fundamental discovery research.



“Engaging more deeply with our alumni and the private sector will be essential in bridging the gap between research and commercial applications.”

When he's not working, Distinguished Professor Greg Cook can be found on his bike.

Equally, early-career researchers need the space to pursue problems on five-, ten-, or even fifteen-year horizons. Developing a deep understanding of fundamental principles is what ultimately enables their application to complex real-world challenges. A healthy research system must therefore strike a balance between immediate impact and sustained investment in curiosity-driven science.

After several years in Brisbane, Cook and his partner Sharron Bennett have settled back into Dunedin life. The temperature difference hasn't stopped Cook's exercise regime of cycling, CrossFit and dog-walking.

“We had to dig out the thermals and electric blankets again. But there's always a great lift in energy with the students around.”

With a son returning from study at Princeton to rejoin the family and a daughter leaving for her OE, Cook claims one of his standout pleasures in life is watching his children have fun and enjoy success.

“The other greatest thing that's ever happened is being given this role as DVC. It's the most perfect job I could have, helping the University of Otago do world-leading research.

“I don't see myself as a boss so much

as a collaborator. I'm here for the team. I think of my role as the conductor of an extraordinary orchestra, because at Otago we have outstanding researchers across a wide range of disciplines. Each brings something distinct and essential, and the strength of the institution comes from how those contributions come together.

“I'm here to open doors for them and to help them achieve what they want to achieve.”

NIGEL ZEGA

Inaugural Te Pou Tiriti role paves the way



Dr Megan Pōtiki is honoured to be Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka, University of Otago's inaugural Te Pou Tiriti. She tells the *Otago Magazine* about turning immense grief into a drive to give back.

DR MEGAN PŌTIKI (KĀI TAHU, KĀTI MĀMOE WAITAHA, TE ĀTIAWA) was brought up on her family's farm and Ōtākou marae towards the tip of the Otago Peninsula. Just down the road was the Royal Albatross Centre at Taiaoroa Head, where these taoka species step off the whenua for the first time to take flight and start their life journey. At age 16, Pōtiki's first job was at the Centre.

These early life experiences and learnings accompany Pōtiki as she steps into the inaugural Te Pou Tiriti role at Otago. Her significant appointment has arisen from the agreement of an enduring Te Tiriti-based partnership, *Te Kaha Uia Te Kaha*, a mana-to-mana agreement signed in 2025 between the University and local mana whenua (see page 44).

As a new member of the University's Senior Leadership Team, Pōtiki says this agreement and her Te Pou Tiriti role pave the way to create a Te Tiriti-led future at Otago.

“It's an inaugural journey that I get to be part of and weave the tapestry of tikanga, te reo and strategy into the University,” Pōtiki says. “It's also full circle for me personally as I get to come back to the place that launched my love for tertiary education and mātauraka Māori.”

Pōtiki was brought up in her bicultural whānau by father, Edward Ellison (Ūpoko o Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou), and Alison,

Photos: Alan Dove

DR MEGAN PŌTIKI (KĀI TAHU, KĀTI MĀMOE WAITAHA, TE ĀTIAWA): “I just thought everyone grew up on their marae, riding horses and in the thick of Māori politics. My upbringing was rich in life, rich in whakapapa, and rich in tikanga.”

“It requires all parties to have a seat at the table for the opportunity to create a healthy marriage and a good partnership. We need to navigate both worlds, to work out how we operate in this space, and how to bring out the best in and for each other.”



As she steps into the inaugural Te Pou Tiriti role at Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka, University of Otago, Dr Megan Pōtiki believes working in the bicultural space involves creating good partnerships.

her Pākehā mother. Raised as Māori, she describes the richness of life surrounding her childhood.

“I just thought everyone grew up on their marae, riding horses and in the thick of Māori politics. My upbringing was rich in life, rich in whakapapa, and rich in tikanga. We ate off the fat of the land.”

Through her Kāi Tahu whakapapa, professional careers in politics, law and medicine were considered the norm. On her mother’s side, Pōtiki was the first to attend university.

“As Māori we are always thinking a hundred years ahead, to a time that exists beyond you and me.”

It wasn’t until she was 18 and in her first year at university when she was asked if she was Māori. “I was utterly shocked – I remember going home and looking in the mirror and realising I didn’t even look Māori.”

As one of two Māori in her cohort at Teachers College in the early 1990s, Pōtiki experienced others who were not interested in race relations, and who did not try to correctly pronounce the names of Māori tamariki.

These experiences have grown Pōtiki’s awareness of the challenges of existing in a bicultural environment, which to an extent mirrors the kaupapa of the Te Pou Tiriti role centred on cultural relationship building.

“It requires all parties to have a seat at the table for the opportunity to create a healthy marriage and a good partnership. We need to navigate both worlds, to work out how we operate in this space, and how to bring out the best in and for each other.”

Sitting at the starting point of the inaugural Te Pou Tiriti role, what does the distant horizon look like to Pōtiki? Her

response refers to paving the way for future generations, and she uses the hypothetical situation of setting up her role to be inherited by her daughter, currently in her second year at Otago.

“It’s about getting it aligned in the right way, and in the right direction and space, where the next person can come in and continue it as the new normal. As Māori we are always thinking a hundred years ahead, to a time that exists beyond you and me.”

For Pōtiki however, the more pressing wero (challenge) is to develop a shared understanding of what Te Tiriti-led looks like. “We all come from a different lens, so my job is to bring it together. We need to give ourselves permission and space to work out what this means for the University and mana whenua.

“Together with mana whenua, we will define what being a Te Tiriti-led university means in each of our campus contexts and jointly develop our capability to operate effectively as Te Tiriti partners. I’m designing this ship as it sails, but what I really want to do is empower tangata Tiriti (Pākehā) to be great and confident partners in Te Tiriti.”

While Pōtiki’s tipuna have been in Aotearoa New Zealand for centuries, more recent settlers arrived with their own cultures and language. Spoken Gaelic could be heard in Dunedin through to the mid-1900s; words like ‘crib’ have entered the vernacular; and bagpipes regularly reverberate through the city. Further up the road in Central Otago, ice curling takes place under big, blue, winter skies.

Pōtiki describes Ōtepoti Dunedin as holding a unique blend of Māori and Scottish heritage that must be celebrated. She asks how it is possible to lean into tangata Tiriti and an identity that will ultimately benefit all.

“We see that narrative reflected in the local buildings and street names, but how do we bring that to the fore and blend it so that Pākehā feel strong in who they are? Because that’s the difference – when you don’t feel strong in who you are and your identity, that

creates a place of fear and resistance.

“To be working in this bicultural space, we need cups to be full for all partners at the table. It’s all about creating a good partnership and how we lift each other up. So that when the water rises, all our ships rise together.”

During her 10 years as a lecturer based in Te Tumu – School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies at Otago, Pōtiki grabbed every opportunity to connect with her Māori identity. Her early years raised as Māori gave her the confidence and springboard to embrace all things Māori, including kapa haka and full immersion te reo.

During that time, she also completed her doctorate exploring factors that had contributed to the end of the Māori language at her kaika (village) of Ōtākou. With three infant children, and a husband with ailing health, it was a long research journey completed over 10 years.

In the years following the 2019 death of her husband, Tahu Pōtiki, she describes turning the immense grief and loss into a super power and a drive to give back. She comes to the Te Pou Tiriti role from her most recent position as the Executive Director at the Otago Polytechnic that she describes gave her yet another valuable lens to the world which she brings to her kaupapa with the University.

Pōtiki says her life has always been driven by the need to give back and was the reason she trained as a teacher. “I’ve had a very fortunate life and now have three stunning tamariki. Just like all children, they have been raised by the village, and in our case, that includes the bigger village of Ōtepoti Dunedin.

“It’s to that village, and to the tangata whenua and tangata Tiriti who call Dunedin home, that I now feel that strong commitment to give back.”

GUY FREDERICK



Photos: Guy Frederick

ABOVE: The University of Otago's new building in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Wai-Ora, on the southern bank of the Ōtākaro Avon River.

BELOW: An artists' impression of Wai-Ora closely matches the nearly completed building.



Welcome to Wai-Ora

The University's new building in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Wai-Ora, is nearly complete and will be formally opened in September. The *Otago Magazine* took a tour.

THE FLOWING WATERS OF THE ŌTĀKARO AVON RIVER are a constant presence through central Christchurch. The city fell around Ōtākaro's banks during the earthquakes; in the time since, buildings have been rising again. Joining this revival, and with its own connection to the river, is the University of Otago's new Christchurch campus flagship building, Wai-Ora.

Located on the southern bank of Ōtākaro, Wai-Ora (meaning water of life) is clothed in a facade that emulates the river's shimmering waters. The name, gifted by local mana whenua Ngāi Tūāhuriri, connects the context of Otago's Christchurch medical campus to the integral role the environment has in health and wellbeing.

The eight-storey building will support a workforce and student body spanning health research, clinical practice and teaching. Head of the Faculty of Medicine and Project Owner for Wai-Ora, Professor Suzanne Pitama (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Whare), says over her 25 years based in Christchurch she has witnessed the huge growth in expertise in health science research and teaching that has been incubated by the campus.

"We have been a plant in a small pot that has been waiting for a chance to grow," Pitama says.

"Wai-Ora will enable us to reach our potential faster by providing more teaching and research opportunities, allowing us to influence the clinical workforce, and allowing

us to benefit the community by providing greater access to a growing number of clinical trials."

Located in the heart of the central city's Te Papa Hauora Health Precinct, Wai-Ora is not only Otago's largest project outside of Dunedin, it is the largest construction project the University has ever undertaken. It will enable the growth of Otago's long-standing contribution to training the future medical and health professionals of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Planning for Wai-Ora began before the Christchurch earthquakes. Former Dean of the Christchurch campus Professor Peter Joyce foresaw the benefits of consolidating the University's growth in the city which had, over time, spread across multiple buildings.

When a site near the current hospital-based campus came up for sale, Joyce seized the opportunity to lead its purchase and lay the path for this project.

Christchurch-born Caitlin Mather, a Project Manager for Wai-Ora, was working at the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority when the city's blueprint and precinct zones were established.

Describing her involvement on the project as a "nice full circle moment", Mather says one of the highlights has been learning about the sheer scale and variety of Otago medical research that takes place in Christchurch.

And while seeing Wai-Ora come to life has been professionally fulfilling, Mather says

the building represents an inspiring starting point.

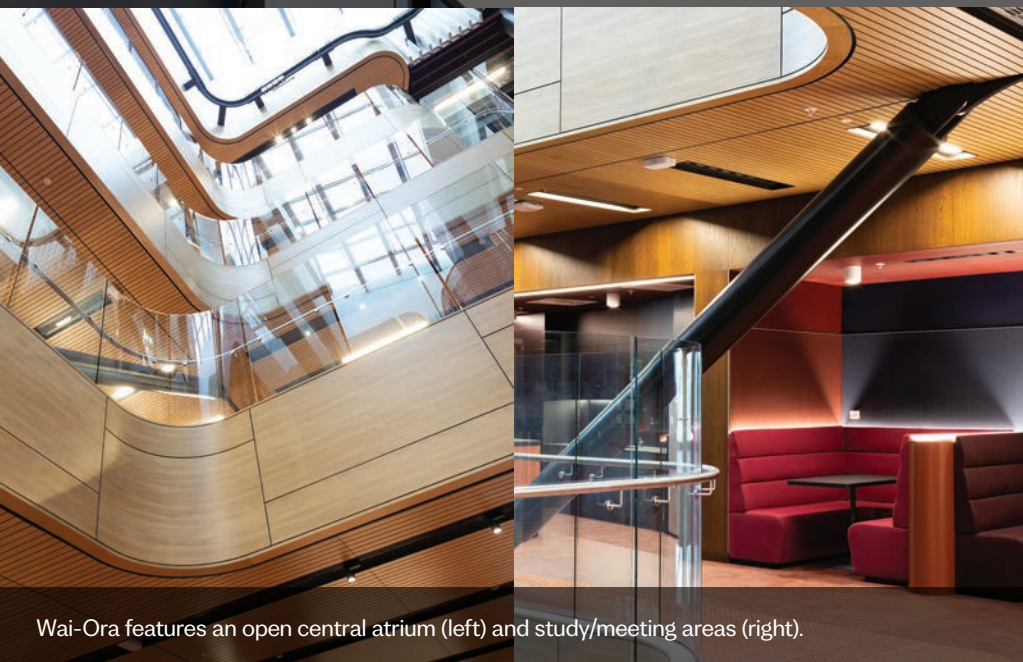
"What's exciting is thinking about what researchers and staff are going to advance in the building in the future. Wai-Ora's location in Te Papa Hauora Health Precinct will also create collaborations with neighbouring health partners that will directly benefit the community."

Wai-Ora will be the flagship home for the 1,000 students and 500 staff of Otago's Christchurch campus. Pitama says the new building will significantly expand the University's ability to undertake world-class research, teaching and clinical trials across a wide range of health challenges, from diabetes to Parkinson's disease.

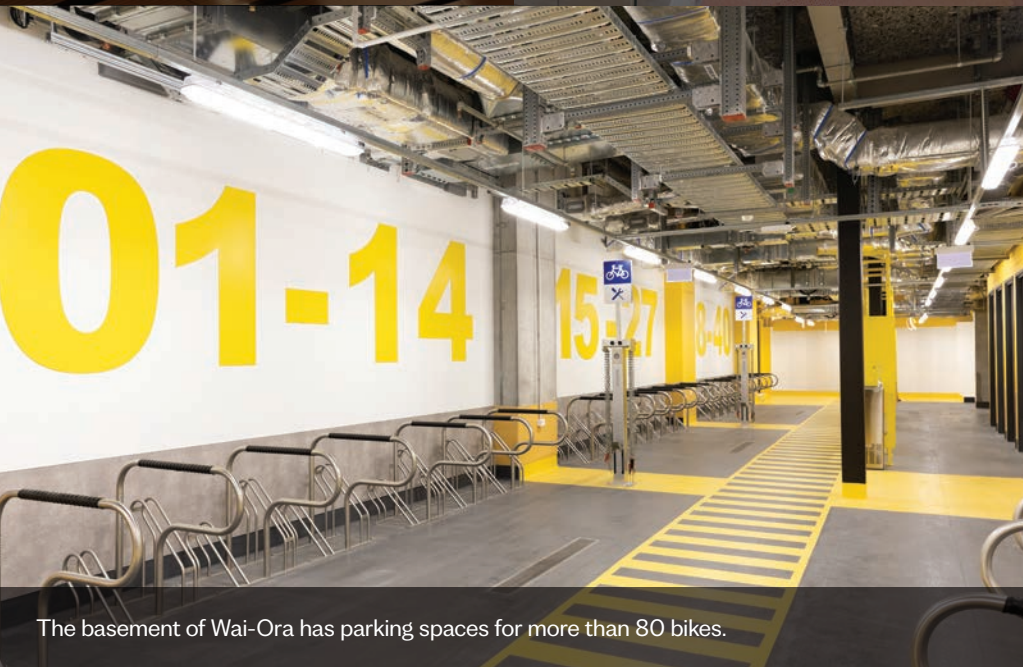
"For me, Wai-Ora represents a love letter from Otago to the people of Christchurch. We've been here for 50 years and are making a further commitment to the city that says we're now here for a long time."



Project Manager Caitlin Mather, Head of Otago's Faculty of Medicine, Professor Suzanne Pitama and Leighs Construction Project Administrator, Jodi Allen check out one of the new lab spaces in Wai-Ora.



Wai-Ora features an open central atrium (left) and study/meeting areas (right).



The basement of Wai-Ora has parking spaces for more than 80 bikes.

FEATURE

“Wai-Ora has been designed to bring researchers, clinicians, educators and students together in a way that strengthens the pathway from discovery to patient care. By expanding our clinical trial capacity, we can offer communities greater access to emerging treatments, therapies and medicines that may not otherwise be available in New Zealand.

“It also creates opportunities for our students to learn in an environment where research and clinical care sit side-by-side – helping train the next generation of health professionals to be curious, innovative and focused on improving health outcomes for our communities.”

Designed to support the development of clinical and professional skills for medical and nursing students, a dedicated simulation centre will include a mock six-bed ward, consulting rooms, and a teaching space. Using simulation-based learning and activities, students will receive enhanced practical training, and the space will also be available for use by external healthcare providers.

Pitama says enhanced collaboration will be one of the biggest benefits of bringing together researchers and clinicians from across the health sector into Wai-Ora. It will welcome a range of students including medical students completing the clinical years of their undergraduate degree, final-year physiotherapy students, and will be a hub for nursing and health science postgraduate students. Clinicians working closely with the hospital will remain based in the existing hospital building.

“Departments and research centres that have traditionally worked separately will now be alongside one another, creating far

“Wai-Ora has been designed to bring researchers, clinicians, educators and students together in a way that strengthens the pathway from discovery to patient care.”

more opportunities for interdisciplinary teaching, research and innovation. Bringing together clinicians from areas such as psychiatry, general practice and other specialties alongside our academic teams will strengthen connections between research, education and clinical practice.

“This will create opportunities for shared teaching, new research partnerships, and innovative approaches to help address the health needs of our communities. The everyday conversations that happen in shared spaces, corridors and over coffee often spark some of the best ideas. Wai-Ora has been intentionally designed to foster those moments of connection.”

This essence of connection is also mirrored in the cultural narrative weaving through the building's external and internal design (see box, right). Pitama acknowledges the valuable engagement with mana whenua Ngāi Tūāhuriri, led by Professor Te Maire Tau, to establish the building's narrative and design elements.

“When we think about Wai-Ora as a metaphor for our commitment and contribution to the community, from a biomedical perspective, at a cellular level, we are made up of water,” Pitama says.

“Our main kaupapa as a medical school is the health and wellbeing of our people, and the narrative embodies this connection between the environment and our health.”

Across the northern exterior of the building, the pattern of the architectural folded louvre shimmers like the waters of the Ōtākaro and braided rivers of the wider Canterbury (Waitaha) region. The feature contributed to the building's 5-star

Green Star rating by reducing the amount of solar gain for the internal space while maintaining natural daylight requirements.

Wai-Ora also features several other future-proofing initiatives that have supported the Green Star accreditation. One of these includes an energy efficient artesian heating and cooling system that uses warmer water from underground aquifers for heat transfer. And, supporting sustainable travel practices and healthy lives in the largely flat and cycling-friendly Christchurch city, a generous space in the basement will accommodate parks for more than 80 bikes.

The opening of Wai-Ora in September will represent the starting point of unlocking a myriad of exciting potential opportunities, Pitama says. On a personal level, she's also looking forward to seeing Joyce's vision come to fruition.

“As a developing academic, Peter was a huge mentor for me, so to be at the completion of his vision and finish his work has a deep meaning. Wai-Ora is a legacy of his love for the University of Otago, the Christchurch campus, and his broader love and social accountability for the local community.

“For me, Wai-Ora represents a love letter from Otago to the people of Christchurch. We've been here for 50 years and are making a further commitment to the city that says we're now here for a long time.

“We are here to support the community to flourish, and for the impacts of our work to ripple widely, like the flowing waters of the Ōtākaro Avon.”

GUY FREDERICK

FEATURE

Wai-Ora's cultural narrative

Wai-Ora, meaning water of life, speaks to the centrality of water in the Ngāi Tahu creation story, wellbeing, and identity. The name, gifted by local mana whenua Ngāi Tūāhuriri, acknowledges the building's location by the Ōtākaro Avon River, historically a key trading post. Wai-Ora represents the spiritual and tangible connections between mana whenua, the building's location, and its focus on health research, clinical practice and education.

The cultural narrative weaving through the building's design features embodies this kaupapa of whakapapa, hauora and interconnectedness. At the entrance, pouwhenua (adorned posts) feature haehae patterns symbolising waterways like the adjacent Ōtākaro River. The paved entrance leading into Wai-Ora features taniko patterns and transitions from dark to light grey, mirroring the riverbanks and the transition from darkness (Te Pō) to light (Te Ao Mārama).

A wall of the large open foyer features a contemporary takarangi pattern (spiral) symbolising the separation of Ranginui and Papatūānuku. Connecting floors across the central atrium space, a vine-like geometric pattern climbs skywards, referencing Tāne Mahuta's ascent to Te Ao Mārama. It also evokes Tāwhirimātea's wind and breath, with design forms inspired by molecules and cellular structures, which connect mātauranga Māori with scientific discipline.



Queenstown quest

“Queenstown’s current technology presence is less than 1 per cent of its total GDP and even if this reached the national average for comparable urban areas, which is 7 per cent, that would add a billion dollars of value to the local economy.”

Queenstown's remarkable beauty has long made it a tourist destination. Now the University of Otago is helping to make it a destination for tertiary study.

THE QUEENSTOWN LAKES DISTRICT IS EXPANDING SO RAPIDLY that it may have a greater population than Dunedin by 2040. This may put added pressure on the area's infrastructure, but the University of Otago is offering bold support.

The University's Queenstown strategy is to establish a local campus in the long-term and provide the area with targeted academic support that helps drive regional growth and innovation along with global impact and connectivity.

Multidisciplinary teams specialising in business leadership, entrepreneurship and digital technologies will run programmes from short upskilling courses to graduate and postgraduate degrees and advanced education.

Immediate projects include a Bachelor of Entrepreneurship, a Master of Digital Technologies, executive education short courses, and developing an academic retreat on land gifted for the purpose.

University research of national significance will align with regional interests to provide positive impact and aims to include collaborative projects with local community partners. Long-term goals include establishing centres of research excellence and a full University of Otago, Queenstown campus.

The Establishment Director of the University of Otago Queenstown/Lakes District Project, Professor Richard Barker, is excited to be driving the University's ambitions after decades of successful

involvements in the region.

The drive stems from a post-Covid challenge given to Roger Sharp, now chair of Technology Queenstown, by the then mayor, to transform the local economy away from its almost total reliance on tourism and the tourist-servicing sector towards a high-return technology sector instead.

“Queenstown’s current technology presence is less than 1 per cent of its total GDP and even if this reached the national average for comparable urban areas, which is 7 per cent, that would add a billion dollars of value to the local economy,” Barker says.

“It was an obvious opportunity for the University to support. We can make a material difference to the community and economy by focusing on digital technology and business and entrepreneurship. We can provide upskilling in governance and leadership and hopefully help develop technology solutions.”

Initial academic programmes should lead to further expansion based on industry needs.

“Our goal is to provide programmes and specialisations that take advantage of what's unique about Queenstown and will attract national and global talent as well as supporting and enhancing the local business community,” Barker says.

Success will drive timelines, but the aim is for a staged expansion, beginning with an AI Residency this year and a Bachelor of Entrepreneurship and postgraduate Digital Technologies programme in 2027.

Scaling up to fit demand would involve developing new programmes.

Over time, teaching facilities will be built including a technology hub and centre for innovation as well as amenities needed in a growing community, such as student childcare and accommodation.

“We anticipate various commercial partners joining us in this precinct,” Barker says. “By partnering with the right companies we could develop and drive curricula, working together on delivery and sharing information as to the latest

developments around the world. Partner companies and visiting guest companies would offer the region an international perspective.”

Otago's Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Commerce) and Dean of the Otago Business School, Professor Maree Thyne, is leading the business academic programmes. As a former Head of the Department of Marketing and with decades of international experience in researching the needs and wants of tourists, Thyne understands more than most what might best suit the region.

Her wide-ranging work with businesses has given her experience in developing courses that can effectively apply academic theory to real-world business challenges.

The articulated Bachelor of Entrepreneurship also involves Professor Conor O'Kane, of Otago's Department of Management, working with Queenstown Resort College (QRC) and will be the first time an Otago qualification will be able to be completed through QRC in the town.

“We believe that this is a clear and distinct opportunity for students to be able to stay in their residence of choice and complete a degree qualification. Many are working in the area already so this will allow them to maintain existing employment and internship roles,” Thyne says.



PROFESSOR RICHARD BARKER: “Our goal is to provide programmes and specialisations that take advantage of what's unique about Queenstown and will attract national and global talent as well as supporting and enhancing the local business community.”



Photo: Jessica Palmer

Jillian Jardine with Vice-Chancellor Grant Robertson at Hākitekura. Jillian and her husband Dick gifted the four-hectare lakeside property to the University in 2016.

FEATURE

“It’s a joy to be able to bring to life the Jardines’ generous gift and we are looking forward to the special role Hākitekura will play ...”

The flexible degree will not require as many prerequisites as some other programmes, so Thyne believes it will appeal to students with many different backgrounds from all over the country.

“We need to establish what other programmes will best suit Queenstown and its surrounds. Our first degree is a good fit because the area has always attracted people with entrepreneurial and innovative skills.”

The Queenstown Lakes District Council and its Economic Development unit are in full support. Many local organisations are interested in providing work and integrated learning opportunities for future programmes, such as guest lectures, mentoring and internships.

In addition to the AI Residency, Thyne is planning other extensive executive education programmes, which she expects will also appeal to overseas professionals.

“Queenstown is an ideal hub for fly-in fly-out participants because it is well served both nationally and internationally to Australia. We expect this connectivity will also attract some big-hitter guest speakers for our programmes.

“Students at all levels can come for a valuable education and stay on for a holiday or establish business connections in the Queenstown Lakes district. They can combine travel, teaching, business and holiday all in one destination.”

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (External Engagement) Professor Jessica Palmer emphasises the importance of wide involvement with local industry, alumni and the community.

The University has an established history of regular interaction in the district including alumni gatherings, Otago’s

Tourism Policy School and events at TechWeek and MindJam. Last year, Otago hosted its long-running annual National Security Forum in Queenstown for the first time, together with the Aspen Institute.

“Events like these bring together leaders in their fields across academic, business, government and NGO sectors,” Palmer says.

“They often catalyse new policy initiatives and research projects that have the potential to make a real contribution to a prosperous and thriving society. We anticipate we will create and support more events like these as our presence grows in the region.”

An important part of that presence will be Hākitekura, a four-hectare lakeside property near Jack’s Point, gifted to the University by locals Dick and Jillian Jardine in 2016.

The restored historic woodshed will be managed by Kellie Bain and will host academic retreats, symposia, short courses, executive education programmes, University-

wide gatherings and community events. It will open as a multi-room facility in 2027, hosting up to 65 people.

“It’s a joy to be able to bring to life the Jardines’ generous gift and we are looking forward to the special role Hākitekura will play in the development of ideas, relationships, discussion and collaboration – all things that are crucial to a successful university,” Palmer says.

She is optimistic about what lies ahead and believes that while the University’s strategy for Queenstown is ambitious, it is strongly focused on collaboration and partnership.

“These are ways of working that we are excited to embrace and which help to ensure the University continues to play an important role in meeting the needs of the community, locally and globally.”

NIGEL ZEGA



Photo: Federico Pagola, Frame Power

Three key staff members are involved in Otago’s Queenstown presence (from left): Professor Maree Thyne is leading the business academic programmes, Professor Richard Barker is Establishment Director of the Queenstown/Lakes District Project, and Kellie Bain will manage Hākitekura.

RESEARCH



Fibre’s future

Two prominent Otago experts have called for dietary fibre to be officially recognised as an essential nutrient – the first ‘new’ essential nutrient in more than 50 years. The *Otago Magazine* discovers why.



Photo: Dave Bull

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ANDREW REYNOLDS: “Politically, we think it could be really important for the government to recognise that OK, fibre is an essential nutrient, and our population is having 30 per cent less than it should.”

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ANDREW REYNOLDS HAS ALWAYS BEEN

INTERESTED in food. The 2025 winner of the Rowheath Trust Award and Carl Smith Medal, which recognises the outstanding research performance of early career staff, Reynolds originally tried his hand at culinary school before deciding to combine his love of food and science and study nutrition.

Reynolds is based in the Department of Medicine (Dunedin), is Co-Director of Otago’s Edgar Diabetes and Obesity Research Centre (EDOR) and Associate Dean of Research for the Faculty of Medicine – Dunedin. Over the past decade, he has been at the forefront of establishing the importance of dietary fibre on human health. Spend an hour speaking to Reynolds and you will be

swapping your white rice for brown before you can say Weetbix.

In a recent comment piece published in the prestigious international science journal *Nature*, Reynolds, along with Professor Sir Jim Mann (KNZM) and other collaborators, makes the case for fibre to be recognised as an essential nutrient.

“There is some confusion about fibre actually being a nutrient, since nutrients are something the body absorbs but fibre passes through. But we actually found out in the 1970s and ‘80s that when fibre is broken down by the microbiome, it produces these short-chain fatty acids that go into the body and become a nutrient,” Reynolds explains.

There is no governing body that deems whether something officially becomes an essential nutrient, rather, it



"If increasing fibre reduces blood pressure, we can see why it reduces cardiovascular disease and stroke. If it reduces cholesterol, we can see why it reduces heart disease. If it reduces blood sugar levels, we can see why it reduces incidence of type 2 diabetes. And if it reduces body weight, which it did, then it helps with lots of things."

is more of a matter of public opinion and research. Still, Reynolds believes the dial is slowly moving for fibre.

"Politically, we think it could be really important for the government to recognise that OK, fibre is an essential nutrient, and our population is having 30 per cent less than it should."

For Mann, who was knighted in 2022 for his services to health, the *Nature* piece is another vindication of his life's work investigating dietary fibre.

"The *Nature* paper, which was Andrew's idea, has been widely read and downloaded, so we are seeing the wider research community pay more attention to fibre. I've been working on fibre and health for over 50 years, so it's pretty rewarding to see this growing shift where it's being taken more seriously as a key component of health," Mann says.

Reynolds says modern human diets have

shifted significantly since pre-agricultural times. One of the biggest changes: a reduction in average daily intakes of dietary fibre.

"Things used to be a lot stringier or barkier," he says.

The drop is substantial. For most of human evolutionary history, people would have eaten around 100 grams or more of fibre per day. Today, for countries like Aotearoa New Zealand and the United States, that figure has dropped to 12 to 20 grams.

While Reynolds is not advocating for a move back to 100 grams, he says modern diets are a far cry from early human diets – thanks to agriculture, food safety and selective breeding – but human physiology remains relatively unchanged.

Otago became involved in 2016 when the World Health Organization (WHO) contacted a group of nutritionists led by

Mann, asking them to pool the evidence base together for dietary fibre and its relationship to health. Until then, most people simply talked about fibre in relation to stool bulking (which can help with constipation), but the WHO asked the group to look beyond that.

"They wanted us to search for the association between fibre intakes and mortality, heart disease, certain types of cancer like colorectal, and type 2 diabetes," Reynolds explains.

Led by Mann, Reynolds and his collaborators conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of the known data, and combined it to search for links between dietary fibre and various health outcomes.

"We were combining data that existed already to get a bigger-picture view of fibre's relationship to heart disease, diabetes, death and certain cancers."



Adding fibre to your diet can be as easy as switching some of your meat for legumes, eating more fruit and vegetables, or passing on that loaf of white bread for bread with whole grains – Associate Professor Andrew Reynolds.



PROFESSOR SIR JIM MANN WITH ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ANDREW REYNOLDS: "I've been working on fibre and health for over 50 years, so it's pretty rewarding to see this growing shift where it's being taken more seriously as a key component of health."

Photo: Luke Pilkinton-Ching

When the results were published in a landmark 2019 paper in *Lancet*, they gained attention.

While long-term prospective health studies linked higher dietary fibre intake to improved health outcomes, smaller trials, where fibre is restricted, gave researchers a pathway for explaining the effects of fibre.

"If increasing fibre reduces blood pressure, we can see why it reduces cardiovascular disease and stroke. If it reduces cholesterol, we can see why it reduces heart disease. If it reduces blood sugar levels, we can see why it reduces incidence of type 2 diabetes. And if it reduces body weight, which it did, then it helps with lots of things," Reynolds says.

"So we saw all those associations and we pulled it together for the first time, and that's what set off this slow wave of action since then."

Since releasing that paper, Reynolds has run his own randomised control trials in Dunedin, as well as capturing qualitative data to find out more about people's perspectives.

"We are trying to capture the efficacy as well as the effectiveness: does it work, and

will people do it?" explains Reynolds. "If it's expensive, or inaccessible, there might be barriers to people increasing their fibre intake."

Another important aspect of Reynolds' research is modelling – taking that link between fibre intake and health, and projecting it forward to see what might happen if the population upped fibre levels to those recommended. This type of analysis may impact government decisions on healthcare, greenhouse gas emissions, and the cost of food and groceries.

"The *Nature* paper, which was Andrew's idea, has been widely read and downloaded, so we are seeing the wider research community pay more attention to fibre."

But how does fibre work? And how do we get more of it?

Reynolds sheds light on this by tracing fibre's journey as it moves through the body.

In the mouth, high fibre foods result in

the mechanical removal of plaque.

"So we have an association between high fibre diets and lower incidents of dental cavities and extreme oral surgeries and things like that," Reynolds says.

Fibre then travels down the oesophagus and into the stomach, where it influences gastric emptying, and can leave people feeling fuller for longer. After the stomach it moves to the small intestine, where it blocks the uptake of cholesterol in the body, as well as blocking sugar absorption.

It then moves into the large intestine, the realm of the gut microbiome. Reynolds says studies are now showing a clear link between the amount of dietary fibre and the density, diversity and functionality of the gut microbiome.

As fibre leaves the body, it increases the volume of the stool, reducing constipation.

Reynolds says sneaking a bit of extra fibre in your diet can be as easy as switching some of your meat for legumes, eating more fruit and vegetables, or passing on that loaf of white bread for bread with whole grains.

CONOR FEEHLY

A passion for reducing harm

Otago’s Dr Rose Crossin aims to bring positive change to the world. Her latest project to investigate youth drug harm fits her mindset well.

A HANDWRITTEN POST-IT NOTE STUCK TO THE COMPUTER SCREEN in Dr Rose Crossin’s Department of Public Health office reads: “*The world will not be this way within the reach of my arm.*”

The quote, from a Thomas Harris novel, serves as a daily reminder to the Ōtākou Whakaihū Waka, Ōtautahi – University of Otago, Christchurch Faculty of Medicine researcher of both the limits and possibilities of her work.

“I can’t fix everything,” she says. “But maybe I can make a difference for some people.”

Six months into an ambitious new research project, Crossin and her team are asking a deceptively simple question: how do young people in Aotearoa New Zealand truly experience drug harm? The answer, she believes, has been missing from government health policy for too long.

Funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC), the multi-year study places youth voices at its centre. It is an approach that reflects both Crossin’s research ethos and her broader commitment to evidence-based, humane drug policy.

“We can’t reduce drug harm for young people if we don’t know how they

experience it,” she says. “This project aims to fix that.”

The work seeks to build a conceptual framework for youth drug harm before moving to measure its frequency and severity across the country. The implications are significant: better-informed healthcare responses, more targeted prevention strategies and policy grounded not in assumption but in lived reality. For Crossin, it is research that should sit at the intersection of science and society.

As a teenager, Crossin was captivated by the classic ‘nature versus nurture’ debate, devouring books that explored what shapes human behaviour.

“I was always interested in people,” she says, “but especially in the big social issues of poverty, equity and the environment. I wanted to know how to make things change for the better.”

Her pathway into population and public health was neither linear nor accidental. Beginning with a degree in biological sciences, she started out in environmental public health roles in Australia. But a pull remained toward deeper inquiry and issues she cared about.

“I’d wanted to undertake a PhD for a long

time,” she says. “When the timing finally worked for our family, I knew it had to be on something meaningful to me, hence drug and alcohol harm.”

Her doctoral research focused on adolescent inhalant use, particularly among vulnerable young people, a topic which immediately grounded her work in issues of equity, stigma and social justice. From there, a role at Monash University cemented her trajectory into alcohol and drug harm research within population health.

Back in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2020 after 19 years overseas, Crossin joined Otago’s then-named Department of Population Health.

Her research since has been as much about advocacy as it is about analysis – ensuring that findings translate into real-world impact.

“Drug use is highly stigmatised, and people often have very strong views,” she says. “But our policy settings are a long way from where the evidence tells us they should be.”

This tension between evidence and policy has driven some of her most influential work. Crossin recently helped lead a three-part project in collaboration with the Helen Clark Foundation, examining how New Zealand allocates funding in response to illegal drugs. It revealed a stark imbalance – that about 68 per cent of government spending goes to law enforcement, compared with a little more than one per cent for harm reduction.

Her collaboration with the Foundation grew out of both professional connections and a long-held admiration for its namesake’s leadership on global drug policy.

“I cannot speak highly enough of the Foundation,” she says. “They are doing incredible work on some of the biggest issues facing Aotearoa. I felt incredibly proud to be part of that work.”

Among her most impactful studies was a landmark investigation into acute alcohol use and suicide in New Zealand. Believed to be the first time coronial data has been used to quantify this link across our population,

“I can’t fix everything. But maybe I can make a difference for some people.”

the research found that more than 26 per cent of suicide deaths over a decade involved alcohol.

Crossin is heartened her work has resulted in some tangible change at a government policy level.

“While more change is needed, a recent update to the Suicide Prevention Action Plan included interventions related to alcohol for the first time, highlighting the impact of good quality public health research,” she says.

If there is a unifying thread across Crossin’s work, it is her commitment to centring the voices of those most affected. Nowhere is this more evident than in a study she describes as one of her proudest achievements – research into injecting-related injuries among needle exchange clients.

The study was co-designed with needle exchange staff and people who use drugs. It documented not only the physical harms experienced, but their broader impact on individuals’ lives – bringing attention to an often-overlooked aspect of drug use.

The research contributed directly to policy change, supporting the inclusion of wound care within needle exchange services. But for Crossin, its significance goes beyond outcomes.

“It was about listening and recognising that people who use drugs are experts in their own experiences, and that their voices should shape the solutions,” she says.

At its core, Crossin’s work is underpinned by a commitment to harm reduction, the idea that policy should focus on minimising negative outcomes, rather than pursuing



DR ROSE CROSSIN: “I was always interested in people, but especially in the big social issues of poverty, equity and the environment. I wanted to know how to make things change for the better.”

unrealistic ideals. “There has never been, and never will be, a drug-free world, so the question becomes how do we reduce harm and support people in the best way possible?” she says.

She is candid in her critique of prohibition-based strategies, which she argues can exacerbate harm rather than reduce it.

“I want to see governments spending money on what we know works, which is investing in a health-based approach to drugs which includes treatment, prevention and harm reduction.”

As her current HRC-funded project gathers momentum, Crossin is focused on

what comes next: translating its findings into meaningful change.

The goal, she says, is not just to understand youth drug harm, but to reshape how it is addressed – across healthcare, education and policy.

“Ultimately,” she says, “if the research can do that – even in a small way – then it’s worth it.”

LORELEI MASON



Photo: Thomas Mattern

RESEARCH

“... the next morning we went down, and we hid in that cave again, and we saw the birds go out into the sea. And that was, for me, a pivotal moment.”

RESEARCH

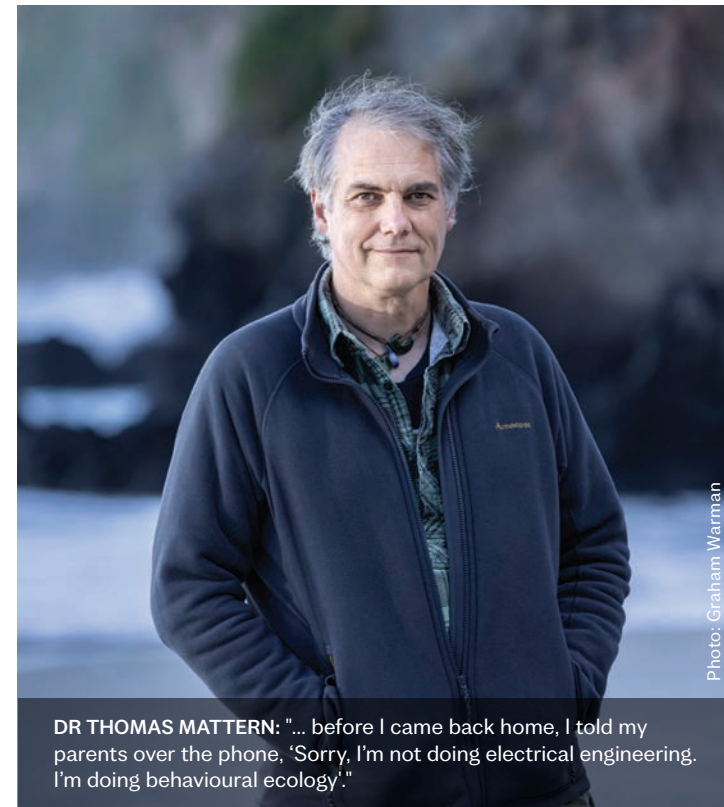


Photo: Graham Warman

DR THOMAS MATTERN: "... before I came back home, I told my parents over the phone, 'Sorry, I'm not doing electrical engineering. I'm doing behavioural ecology'."



Photo: Thomas Mattern

ABOVE AND MAIN: Erect-crested penguins - whose 'eyebrows' stick up from their heads, punk-like.

In the elements

Aotearoa New Zealand is home to one third of the world's penguin species, yet little is known about many of them. Otago's Dr Thomas Mattern is on a mission to understand our penguins' lives, diets, migrations and stressors – and to help others get to know them too.

DR THOMAS MATTERN WAS WAITING TO BE PICKED UP FROM THE SUBANTARCTIC ISLANDS, and the clock was ticking. He had been on Antipodes Island for two-and-a-half months, fitting GPS trackers to 41 penguins. Now it was time to go. But the wind sheared ruthlessly over the cliffs and flattened the already-flat tussock. He could see his ride out in the bay, the ship *Evohe*, masts swaying in the mist. It was not coming any closer. The swell made it too dangerous to land.

Once off the island, the Otago zoologist was hoping to stop by another subantarctic archipelago, the Bounty Islands. He had left a data logger there collecting transmissions from Bounty Island penguins, and he needed to pick it up on the way home. No data logger meant no data. But the longer the weather held them up, the more impossible it became. *Evohe* was tightly scheduled.

And so Mattern and his field team waited

until the next day, and the next. And the next. He felt the window of opportunity gliding shut.

When they finally boarded, after four days' delay, he braced himself for bad news. "The skipper said, 'Hey, Thomas, I want to talk to you about the Bounties,'" says Mattern. "And I thought, 'Oh, now the hammer is going to fall.' And he said, 'We can only give you a few hours'. I said, 'Yes, that's all I need, please!'"

Still, Mattern knew the Bounties were a gamble. If conditions were bad, he would not be able to land there, either. "We arrived there and skipper looked out and said, 'Ugh, this is looking rough.' And then he looked a bit more, and then he said, 'Actually, there are a few moments here that we can give it a whirl.'"

Giving it a whirl meant waiting for a wave that could lift Mattern high enough up the side of the island that he could leap onto a

small ledge on the rock face and scramble up a narrow set of footholds. He made it. "We managed to recover that thing [the data logger], and we had the best data set ever. So it really, really paid off."

This is typical of Mattern's research on penguins: a hostile location, inclement weather, and data that has never been collected before, probably because of those two factors.

The logger he retrieved contained a record of the penguins' foraging trips during the breeding season, showing how far they travelled, how deep they dived, and how long they spent hunting. Now he had two sets to analyse: one from the Bounties, and one from Antipodes.

Over the past four years, Mattern has been trying to discover why two groups of erect-crested penguins have different fates. One population lives on the Bounty Islands archipelago, and is thriving; the other lives

on Antipodes Island, and is dwindling. No one knows why. "And these islands are just 200 kilometres apart, so it's absolutely bizarre," Mattern says. "We suspect that the foraging, what happens out at sea, that is the key to explaining what's happening with the populations."

Mattern and his team also left something behind on Antipodes Island: a livestreaming camera, nicknamed TawakiCam pointed at the penguin colony at Anchorage Bay. Last summer, anyone could hop online and watch erect-crested penguins going about their day. Next year, Mattern will move it to Fiordland and train it on another species he studies: tawaki, or Fiordland crested penguins.

Both penguin species have a distinct look: violently yellow eyebrows, which are the crests of their name. In erect-crested penguins, the 'eyebrows' stick up from their heads, punk-like, but on the Fiordland species, they droop, as though they've been

suavely combed back. Neither species of penguin is very well known, thanks to their remote, hidden lives. Mattern has spent his career trying to change that.

Mattern never set out to study penguins. He was going to become an electrical engineer. Originally from a working-class family in Dusseldorf, Germany, he was the first in his family to go to university – but then he spent his gap year after high school tramping in New Zealand. After hearing that he might be able to see kiwi in the wild on Stewart Island/Rakiura, Mattern and a friend started out on the Northwest Circuit.

It was tough going compared to the other tramping tracks he had done, and after a week, they still hadn't seen any kiwi. Settling in at Long Harry Hut, on Rakiura's north coast, Mattern heard strange noises coming from the beach below. "I went down to investigate, and I found these weird footprints in the sand. So I hid in a little rock cave and I saw, for the first time in my life, penguins outside of a zoo. There were yellow-eyed penguins in this perfect sunset just coming out of the water and walking past me."

Mattern told his friend, and they planned to both watch for the penguins. "So the next morning we went down, and we hid in that cave again, and we saw the birds go out into the sea. And that was, for me, a pivotal moment."

Mattern had expected the penguins to swim on the surface of the water, like ducks, out to the horizon. Instead, they dived into the waves and were gone. No heads popped up. No splashes. "They just disappeared from view. And I thought, 'Why on earth, as a bird, would you give up flying to live under water

where there are sharks?'"

The question didn't leave him alone. He kept turning it over in his head for the rest of his trip. "And before I came back home, I told my parents over the phone, 'Sorry, I'm not doing electrical engineering. I'm doing behavioural ecology.' They went, 'What?' I hung up quickly, and there went my chance of a well-paying job."

In fact, Mattern was seized by questions, hungry to find out what underpinned the natural world around him. It was only by coincidence that he ended up back in New Zealand for his master's degree – on a project looking at penguins.

At first, Mattern's research focused on hoiho/yellow-eyed penguins. During his PhD, he started looking into tawaki/Fiordland crested penguins, only to realise it was too difficult to study them. "They are super inaccessible. First of all, you have to find them. And you have to find them in Fiordland. The needle in the haystack is easy to find compared to tawaki in the rainforest."

When you're a PhD student, you don't have time to spare simply looking for your study subjects. But eventually, the time did come. In 2014, Mattern and his wife, ecologist Ursula Ellenberg, started a non-profit, The Tawaki Project, to support and foster research into the species.

No baseline data about tawaki existed before Mattern. No one even knew how many there were. Estimates put the tawaki population at 3,000 breeding pairs, but the Tawaki Project's data revised those numbers to between 12,000 and 25,000. As a result, they have been officially recategorised as less endangered than thought.

The Tawaki Project is funded by

"... these islands are just 200 kilometres apart, so it's absolutely bizarre."

philanthropy and public donations, and local operators in Fiordland provide "massive support". Mattern and his team work for it for free. Still, it sustains him, in a way – it allows him to work on a species that is not in catastrophic decline, in dramatic contrast to his research on mainland hoiho. "Every additional year I worked with hoiho, my mental health got worse and worse and worse," he says. "Towards the end, I thought, 'Okay, we have researched everything we can research. We have a clear idea what needs to be done in order to preserve the species on the mainland. But nothing's happening.'"

Hoiho are long gone from the beach below Long Harry Hut, though Mattern heard rumours that one pair had returned to the spot last summer. Thirty years earlier, he had seen a group of 16.

New Zealand, he says, is surprisingly complacent about penguins. "The whole world is crazy about penguins, and sometimes I get the feeling we are the only nation on this planet that isn't," he says. "We've got one-third of the world's penguin population, and we've got the worst record of looking after them. The penguins in Antarctica, in South Africa, in South America are better protected than any of the species here."

That is part of the reason why Mattern set up TawakiCam. He knows most New Zealanders can't tell their Fiordland crested from their erect-crested penguins, and that's mostly because we have never had a chance to meet them.

"We thought that TawakiCam might be a way to bring the public a bit closer."

REBEKAH WHITE



150

years of

teacher education

In 2026, the University of Otago College of Education celebrates 150 years of teacher education in Dunedin. While the College hasn't been under the University umbrella for all of this time, the milestone provides an opportunity to look back and look forward.



LEFT TO RIGHT: 1: Boys seated at desks in classroom (1969). 2: 'Story time' at the Helen Deem Centre for Pre-School Education, 1950s. 3: Sack race at the Caledonian Ground (12 October 1969). 4: School bus at George Street School (1936). TOP: Teacher and children with computer (1990s). Hocken Collections – Uare Taoka o Hākena (left to right): AG-744-117/003, AG-007/007/001, AG-744-117/008, AG-294-49/075/001. (Top) MS-2892/102/001.

OPPORTUNITY. RESILIENCE. ADAPTABILITY. BELONGING.

For retiring University of Otago College of Education Professor, Hugh Morrison, these four words sum up 150 years of teacher education in Dunedin.

Morrison is a lecturer and research historian at the College. But his connection

to the place, and its history, is far more personal.

His great-grandfather Edward Pinder was one of Dunedin's first pupil-teachers and rose to become principal of what was then the Dunedin Training College. Morrison is part of the fourth generation of teachers in his family – his grandparents, parents and

both his siblings also studied to become teachers in Dunedin.

As Morrison explains, 1870s Dunedin was a fast-growing settlement in need of teachers. Its Scottish Presbyterian founders drew on a model from their homeland – the 'pupil-teacher' system where bright senior students apprenticed in schools under



The erect-crested penguin colony at Anchorage Bay – on which Mattern last summer set up a live-stream camera for anyone to observe penguin activity.





Photo: Dave Bull

PROFESSOR VIVIENNE ANDERSON: “The 150th milestone gives us a unique opportunity to honour and remember all those who have built this proud reputation and are part of the College’s story.”



Photo: Sharron Bennett

Retiring University of Otago College of Education Professor Hugh Morrison.

capturing some of these stories.

Anderson says that, following a 2021 review of the College, rebuilding partnership with mana whenua became a key priority, as was the creation of Māori and Pacific leadership roles. She recognises the leadership of Dunedin papatipu rūnaka (Ōtākou, Puketeraki and Moeraki) in this process, and notes the work is ongoing to strengthen and grow reo and mātauranga Māori content within College programmes and attract more Māori and Pacific students into teaching.

Anderson acknowledges a sense of ‘back to the future’ in this regard. For example, Te Pōkai Mātauranga o te Ao Rua was originally approved as a bilingual (rather than a bicultural) programme, and many graduates of this programme have become educational leaders in kura kaupapa and bilingual settings as well as in mainstream education. In discussion with rūnaka, in both

Dunedin and Southland (Waihōpai, Awarua, Ōraka Aparima and Hokonui), efforts have begun to revert to bilingual provision while making the programme accessible beyond Invercargill.

Anderson is proud of the College’s research history, which has focused on many aspects of education, including educational equity and improving educational practice. Dunedin has been the home of the Ministry of Education’s national curriculum monitoring study for more than 30 years. Recent developments have included the creation of a new Kaihautū Māori role, which Anderson says, has transformed the study for tamariki and whānau Māori.

She describes the curriculum monitoring study as a taoka that is the envy of colleagues offshore.

The College has been a long-time leader in national curriculum development and review, although Anderson acknowledges

the education sector has always been a ‘political football’ and changes of government can bring big swings in curriculum and funding – with initial teacher education inevitably impacted. Responding to this requires a high level of resilience and adaptability from College staff, and a continued commitment to engaging with the sector and prioritising the needs of tamariki and whānau.

Covid-19 and its associated lockdowns brought upheaval, particularly to early childhood settings, schools, and to those initial teacher education candidates, where time spent in centres and classrooms is a critical part of programmes.

Anderson says the 150th anniversary is an opportunity to reflect on successes and challenges over the College’s history – and look to the future – as articulated in a whakataukī marking the celebration.

Hoki whakamuri, kia anga whakamua – Look to the past to forge the future.

“The 150th milestone gives us a unique opportunity to honour and remember all those who have built this proud reputation and are part of the College’s story.

“It is also a time to look to the future, to consider our role in developing the educators and educational researchers of tomorrow, with a view to co-creating an education system that better serves the needs and aspirations of all tamariki, mokopuna and whānau.”

KIM THOMAS

As part of the 150th celebrations, Kim Thomas met three graduates from three different programmes – and heard how the College has changed their lives.



BERNICE MENE: “I use the skills to this day, especially planning ... and create inspiring content or lesson plans.”



DR PETER DUNCAN: “From my first days at teachers’ college in Dunedin I could see it would be a wonderful job, and I was right.”



TUIVULAVULA (TUI) UNUA: “It is a beautiful place with beautiful people, and I’m very happy I chose to study here in Dunedin.”

From captain to teacher

In 2000, Bernice Mene undertook postgraduate study at the University of Otago’s College of Education in Invercargill – adding a new dimension to her undergraduate degree in linguistics and enhancing the leadership skills she needed as the 19th captain of Aotearoa New Zealand’s national netball team, the Silver Ferns.

Now living in Auckland and working in people and culture, human resources, governance and youth mentoring roles, Mene says the skills she gained in her year of teacher education are as relevant now as they were then.

“I use the skills to this day, especially planning which you learn to develop to engage effectively with people, meet curriculum requirements and create inspiring content or lesson plans. I also work a lot with young people in the not-for-profit sector.”

At high school, Mene loved learning languages. She was planning on doing an undergraduate teaching degree until a fellow national netball teammate persuaded her to ‘do what you love first’ before finding a way to turn it into a career.

She completed a Bachelor of Arts at Victoria University, majoring in linguistics, then began postgraduate teacher education while playing for the Southern Sting netball franchise.

Mene says the qualification was “a way to bring my undergraduate degree into the real world” and worked with the schedule and demands of playing netball at a high level.

Mene taught for two years while playing international netball and gained her teacher registration, before retiring from both international netball and classroom teaching in 2002. She worked in various educational roles across government, health and sport sectors before moving into a career in the commercial world.

Continuing education

In 1955, 18-year-old high school student Peter Duncan was called on to explain a particularly gnarly maths problem to the rest of his class. His teacher, struck by Duncan’s knack for communicating complex ideas, suggested he apply for a place at teachers’ college.

Seventy years later, an 88-year-old Duncan would graduate with a Doctor of Philosophy in Education from the University of Otago, becoming what is believed to be the oldest person to complete a PhD there.

The PhD is the final (for now) step in Duncan’s lifelong education journey, which began as a student at the then named Dunedin Teachers’ College. The qualification launched a distinguished career as a teacher, lecturer, international educational consultant and Education Department and Ministry of Education official – including during the 1980s and ‘90s in the offices of Ministers Hon. David Lange and Hon. Lockwood Smith. He capped this off with three years of doctoral research.

His thesis, *Teachers’ reflections of changed beliefs and practices*, examined the impact of early literacy development on teachers and how those experiences shaped their pupils and careers over subsequent decades.

“From my first days at teachers’ college in Dunedin I could see it would be a wonderful job, and I was right. It offered me so many opportunities, as it will continue to do for those attending the University of Otago today.”

Community connection

Tuivulavula (Tui) Unua graduated from the University of Otago with a Bachelor of Teaching in Early Childhood in 2025.

She now works at the University of Otago Childcare Association with infants and preschoolers, and regularly visits the College of Education to say hello to staff and gain ongoing insight into being the best teacher she can be.

Unua wasn’t planning on becoming a teacher until almost the end of her final year of high school in Palmerston North. Her homestay mother, an early childhood educator, suggested it as an option after Unua was awarded a scholarship to study in Dunedin.

“I’m so glad I made that choice. I absolutely love it. Seeing the world through the eyes of tamariki is very interesting. Every day I am learning more and more.”

During her time at the College, Unua became the first early childhood student to complete third-year professional experience at Punavai o le Atamai, the Pacific preschool in Dunedin.

“There I was part of the community and was taught and mentored by everyone rather than having one mentor.”

Her appreciation for the College and its staff deepened through the support they offered during the Covid-19 pandemic, and later when she experienced mental health challenges. When she needed to pause her studies and return to Papua New Guinea, College staff helped her resume and complete her qualification.

“It is a beautiful place with beautiful people, and I’m very happy I chose to study here in Dunedin.”

Join the celebrations

16–18 October 2026

Join us to celebrate 150 years of teacher education in Ōtepoti. Reconnect with classmates and staff, share memories and celebrate the incredible community of teachers who began their journey here. Round up your “old” college crew and come along!

Enjoy a range of events including tours, panel discussions and more.

See events.otago.ac.nz/education150 for more.



Rethinking responsibility

Professor Rob Aitken and Associate Professor Leah Watkins believe marketing needs to take a look at its role in unhealthy consumption.



Photo: Alan Dove

PROFESSOR ROB AITKEN AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LEAH WATKINS: “If marketing has the capacity to shape behaviour at scale, then its ethical boundaries cannot be defined solely by what is legal or profitable.”

A HIGH-PROFILE LAWSUIT IN THE UNITED STATES IS TAKING AIM AT MAJOR ULTRA-PROCESSED FOOD COMPANIES, accusing them of contributing to widespread ill health. The legal arguments will be tested in court, but the broader significance of the case lies elsewhere. It reflects a growing recognition that the problem is not only what we consume, but the commercial systems that shape those choices.

Aotearoa New Zealand is unlikely to remain insulated from these developments. As global attention intensifies, similar questions will increasingly arise here about regulation, corporate responsibility, and whether existing approaches to public health are sufficient.

At first glance, the lawsuit’s claims may seem unsurprising. The links between ultra-processed foods and chronic disease are well established. Yet, focusing solely on products risks missing the larger issue. Food is only one part of a wider landscape that includes alcohol, gambling, and other industries whose commercial success depends on patterns of consumption associated with harm.

What connects these sectors is not just what they sell, but how they sell it. Each relies on highly developed marketing systems designed to expand markets, deepen engagement and normalise use. These systems are not peripheral to business strategy – they are central to it.

Despite this, marketing rarely sits at the centre of public debate. It is often treated as a neutral background function: a way of informing consumers and facilitating exchange. This framing is convenient, but it obscures the extent of marketing’s influence.

Marketing does not simply respond to demand; it helps to create it. It shapes preferences, frames choices and establishes social norms. Over time, it can transform occasional behaviours into routines, and routines into expectations. In doing so, it blurs the line between independent choice and structured influence.

The empirical evidence is substantial. Exposure to marketing is consistently associated with increased consumption across multiple product categories. Tobacco marketing increases smoking initiation, alcohol advertising increases hazardous drinking, and the promotion of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods drives excess consumption and shapes dietary habits from an early age.

These effects are not incidental. They reflect sustained investment in understanding and influencing behaviour – drawing on psychology, data analytics and increasingly sophisticated digital technologies. Contemporary marketing operates with a level of precision and reach that was unimaginable even a decade ago, allowing firms to tailor messages to individuals and deliver them at scale.

Public health researchers have long recognised that this should be understood as a structural issue and that rising rates of non-communicable disease are not simply the result of poor individual choices, but of systems that systematically steer behaviour in particular directions. The concept of ‘harmful marketing’ frames these practices as a commercial determinant of health, highlighting their role in shaping environments that encourage unhealthy consumption.

Those systems are neither accidental nor neutral. Harmful products are made highly visible, widely available, and often more affordable and convenient than healthier alternatives. They are embedded in everyday life and linked to desirable activities – relaxation, celebration, success and social connection. Digital platforms amplify these dynamics, enabling messages to be targeted with increasing accuracy and frequency.

In such conditions, appeals to ‘personal responsibility’ begin to look unconvincing. Individuals still make choices, but those choices are made within environments saturated with commercial influence. When exposure is constant and cumulative, it becomes difficult to argue that consumption patterns reflect purely independent decision-making.

The implications are particularly stark for vulnerable groups. Children encounter marketing long before they can recognise

its persuasive intent or critically evaluate its claims. Lower-income communities are often more heavily exposed and more severely affected, reinforcing existing inequalities. These patterns are not incidental; they reflect how commercial incentives are structured and deployed.

This raises a fundamental ethical tension. According to its own professional definition, marketing is intended to create value not only for organisations and customers, but for society as a whole. That aspiration becomes increasingly difficult to reconcile with the continued promotion of products known to contribute to harm.

We argue that once the negative impacts of certain products are well established, the ethical legitimacy of aggressively marketing them comes into question. The issue is not simply whether such practices are legal, but whether they are morally defensible within a broader conception of social responsibility.

Importantly, this is not just a matter of individual firms behaving irresponsibly. It reflects a wider system. Markets reward growth, and growth is typically achieved by increasing consumption. Marketing is

“Marketing does not simply respond to demand; it helps to create it. It shapes preferences, frames choices and establishes social norms.”

the primary mechanism through which that expansion occurs. In this context, the promotion of harmful products is not an anomaly – it is a predictable outcome of how success is defined and pursued.

Legal challenges, such as the current case in the United States, may help to expose these contradictions. But they are unlikely to resolve them on their own. The underlying dynamics are too deeply embedded in contemporary market systems.

A more meaningful response requires a shift in perspective. For policymakers, this means recognising marketing as a driver of consumption and, therefore, a legitimate focus of regulation. Measures such as restrictions on advertising – particularly to children – clearer product labelling, and policies that better reflect the social costs of

harmful products all have a role to play.

For businesses, the challenge is more fundamental. It is no longer sufficient to combine aggressive demand-generation strategies with messaging about ‘responsible use’. There is a growing expectation that corporate conduct aligns with long-term societal wellbeing. In some cases, this may require difficult decisions about product portfolios and growth strategies.

For the marketing discipline itself, the implications are profound. If marketing has the capacity to shape behaviour at scale, then its ethical boundaries cannot be defined solely by what is legal or profitable. The more difficult question is whether all forms of demand creation should be treated as equally legitimate.

The lawsuit may focus on food, but the issues it raises extend far beyond it. If harmful consumption is sustained not only by products, but by the systems that promote them, then addressing the problem requires confronting those systems directly.

That is a conversation we have, until now, largely avoided.

Retirement for leading light of healthy housing

Distinguished Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman's name has become synonymous with healthy housing research in New Zealand. The *Otago Magazine* caught up with her after her retirement function in March.

AS CO-DIRECTOR OF HE KĀINGA ORANGA – HOUSING AND HEALTH RESEARCH PROGRAMME and Director of the New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Cities at the Faculty of Medicine – Wellington, Distinguished Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman has led groundbreaking research demonstrating that warm, dry homes significantly reduce the rates of infectious, respiratory and cardiovascular disease and deaths.

But when Howden-Chapman (QSO, CNZM, FRSNZ) retired in March, she redirected the attention to the future of her research programmes, and on her colleagues who would carry on her legacy.

It was a message that was largely and good-naturedly ignored by those who spoke at a function in Wellington to celebrate her achievements over more than 40 years of work at the University.

The Head of the Department of Public Health, Associate Professor Ruth Cunningham, told those at the event that Howden-Chapman had shaped the research and policy landscape in housing and health, both in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas.

"Her team's research has had a profound impact on public policy, both in New Zealand, underpinning the Government's Warm Up New Zealand programme,

and the healthy homes standards, and internationally, where she served as Chair of the World Health Organization Housing and Health Guideline Development Group."

Close colleague and Co-Director of He Kāinga Oranga, Professor Nevil Pierse, told those gathered there were now 600,000 houses in New Zealand, a third of the entire housing stock, that had been insulated because of schemes led by Howden-Chapman.

"There are 200,000 people who have had a healthy homes initiative and had their lives directly improved. There are 40,000 children who haven't had a hospitalisation in the past five years because of work she and her team have led."

A social scientist who began her early career as a clinical psychologist, Howden-Chapman was drawn to housing research after working in an alcohol and drug treatment unit and learning that people leaving the facility were struggling to find a decent place to live.

"Housing is very important to me," she says. "I see it as a fundamental human right to live in a warm, dry house and I cannot see why a relatively wealthy country like ours can't provide that."

She is proud of her success in building multidisciplinary teams to work on healthy

housing, bringing together people from different fields of expertise ranging from respiratory medicine and infectious diseases, to physics and building science.

It has also been quite useful, she says wryly, to be married to an economist. Her husband Professor Ralph Chapman is an academic at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington.

Together the group has demonstrated the impact of cold, damp, mouldy homes on the development of asthma and viral infections in infants, the harmful health effects from the use of unflued gas heaters, the extent and impact of homelessness, the benefits of insulation and heating retrofits on health, and the benefits of home modifications in reducing injuries from falls.

At her farewell, Howden-Chapman was photographed with some of the postgraduate students she has supervised over her career, many of whom have gone on to highly successful academic careers themselves.

Dr Kimberley O'Sullivan is one of them. She has found her own niche within the healthy housing research field, specialising in energy poverty and the energy efficiency of housing and its relationship to health.

She says Howden-Chapman strategically and deliberately taught her students and colleagues that connecting with the

"There are 200,000 people who have had a healthy homes initiative and had their lives directly improved. There are 40,000 children who haven't had a hospitalisation in the past five years because of work she and her team have led."

DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR PHILIPPA HOWDEN-CHAPMAN: "I see it as a fundamental human right to live in a warm, dry house and I cannot see why a relatively wealthy country like ours can't provide that."

community to understand their concerns always had to come first.

For Otago Vice-Chancellor Grant Robertson, the relationship with Howden-Chapman started as a professional one when he worked for the University as a Business Development Manager in the Research and Enterprise Office in Wellington.

But as the two conceived the idea of setting up the New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Cities, on the back of a napkin on a café table in Wellington's Aro Valley, their collegial working relationship turned into a lifelong friendship.

"It was a great joy of my working life to work with Philippa and a much wider team to put the Centre together," he says.

He acknowledged her leadership and her ability to spot talent and to bring out the best in people, saying it was one of her greatest attributes.

"You leave behind you an extraordinary team, and that is down to you because you made the effort to understand people and to support them and to make sure they succeed."

Her work with communities was highlighted by Cheryl Davies (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Wehiwehi, Ngāti Mutunga ki Te Wharekauri), an Otago public health researcher, Wainuiōmata Marae Trust Board

secretary, and manager of Tū Kotahi Māori Asthma Trust at Kōkiri Marae.

Davies says it was largely as a result of Howden-Chapman's commitment and support that a papakāinga housing development was being built on the Wainuiōmata Marae.

"In two years' time, 12 whānau will be living in warm, dry homes as part of our papakāinga and this is largely due to Philippa's commitment and support over the past 15 to 20 years in planning and securing funding."

In 2023, when Howden-Chapman was awarded the University's top honour – the Distinguished Research Medal – she chose the topic 'Speaking truth to power' for her lecture.

The topic references the role of academics, enshrined in national legislation, to act as the 'critic and conscience of society'.

It's a role Howden-Chapman took to heart.

Never shy of talking to policymakers, parliamentarians, community leaders, people on the street, and taxi drivers, Howden-Chapman has single mindedly set about educating, informing and persuading all those she has come into contact with of the importance of good quality housing, including the adequate provision of

affordable, healthy and secure public and community housing.

Over the course of her career, she has been widely lauded both nationally and internationally. She and her team were awarded the Rutherford Medal, New Zealand's top research honour, by the Royal Society Te Apārangi in 2021. In 2014, she became the first woman, and the first social scientist, to win the Prime Minister's Science Prize.

She was one of seven leading scholars appointed as inaugural Sesquicentennial Distinguished Chairs, Poutoko Taiea, by the University in 2019. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand and was a director on the board of Crown Agency Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities for six years.

Howden-Chapman says she is grateful to all those who have supported her research, including her colleagues, as well as to the politicians who have backed healthy housing policies.

She will continue to have a presence on the Wellington campus, and plans to work on her next book – her 18th – in retirement, which focuses on the way forward for evidence-based housing policy.

CHERYL NORRIE



Pacific partnership

INCREASING THE ABILITY AND CAPACITY TO FIGHT ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE and improve disease surveillance and prevention in the Pacific has been given a significant boost with the opening of the Regional Centre for Antimicrobial Resistance and Genomics at Fiji National University (FNU).

The centre is a joint initiative between FNU, the University of Otago – Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka and The Pacific Community (SPC). It provides vital local capacity for pathogen genomic sequencing, to increase the region's ability to tackle antimicrobial resistance – which occurs when bacteria and viruses no longer respond to medicines – through improved testing, tracking and early disease detection.

Associate Dean Pacific of the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences at Otago, Dr Saki Baleivanualala, has played a central role in establishing the centre, having seen first-hand how much this sort of capacity is needed.

"I was working in Fiji hospitals for quite a number of years and that's where I encountered a lot of antimicrobial resistance infections, but we do not have the technology to detect those outbreaks as early as possible. So, we had to collect samples and send them to overseas laboratories."

That situation led him to Otago to study antimicrobial resistance, using modern technology, so he could take that knowledge to Fiji, and the rest of the Pacific region. This, in turn, prompted his move to



DR SAKIUSA BALEIVANUALALA: "It has been predicted that by 2030, around 32,000 Pacific people will die if we do not come up with a solution to tackle this antimicrobial resistance ... So we are part of the solution, to stop this before it happens."

Representatives from Fiji National University (FNU), University of Otago – Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka and The Pacific Community (SPC) at the official opening of the Regional Centre for Antimicrobial Resistance and Genomics at FNU in March. Dignitaries in attendance included, seated in the front row (left to right), Turaga na Tui Suva (High Chief of Suva) Ratu Sanaila Mudunavosa, Otago Vice-Chancellor Hon Grant Robertson, and FNU Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research Professor Nii-K Plange.

establish the centre.

Baleivanualala says sending samples away for analysis had its costs, both in terms of money and lost time.

"Sometimes, by the time we received results, the patient had passed away or been discharged from hospital."

His Otago contacts proved crucial. Working with his mentor Professor James Ussher they applied for funding and received vital support from the Maurice Wilkins Centre and Te Niwha, allowing them to get the technology required for the new centre.

"Without them we couldn't achieve what we are doing."

The aim was to not only be the centre for Fiji, but for the whole Pacific, as many of the students from the region go to Fiji to study.

"So that would be part of the local capacity and we would train them, so when they go back they would have some understanding around this new technology and the centre," he says.

"It needed to be something that the Pacific Islands could sustain. It has to be cost-effective in a way that when the grant finishes, each country can continue the work."

Training local people to do the work has also been an important part of the blueprint, and staff from Fiji are now running the

sequencing programme.

They are now talking to other Pacific communities about bringing in people from around the region to train, so that they can collect samples to be sent to Fiji, rather than having to send them on to labs in Australia or New Zealand.

Further down the track he would like to see this analysis work carried out in other parts of the region as well.

"It has been predicted that by 2030, around 32,000 Pacific people will die if we do not come up with a solution to tackle this antimicrobial resistance. In the Pacific context, that is a huge number and it is something we are really worried about.

"So we are part of the solution, to stop this before it happens."

Building research capacity and talent is also an important part of the equation.

"Future plans for academic collaboration, particularly opportunities for students and staff from University of Otago, Fiji National University, and other local and international institutions to undertake research in the Pacific and contribute to regional capacity building."

Those involved in running the centre also hope to expand this capacity to other countries as well, so they can bring people to the Fiji hub to be trained.

"It's for the Pacific, it's based in the Pacific and led by the Pacific. That is the whole idea."

MARK WRIGHT

Books by Otago alumni

New Zealand Maid: Esther James and Her Campaigning New Zealand and Australian Walks During the Great Depression, by Ian Dougherty, Saddle Hill Press, June 2026.

Penning Your Past: A writer's guide by Dr Angela Robertson, Amazon, February 2026.

Rangatiratanga and Gentlemanship: A conversation in 1825 by Grant Hodgson, Writes Hill Press in association with Gentlemanship Publications, September 2025.

Anything Could Happen by Grant Robertson, Allen & Unwin, August 2025.

Wellington's Indian Story: Beyond a Century by Dr Jacqueline Leckie, Wellington Indian Association, July 2025.

Harley Chambers: The building and its tenants by Claire Le Couteur, The Cotter Medical History Trust, June 2025.

Justice in Tourism Destinations: Avenues for Destination Governance and Management by Pooneh Torabian and Julia Albrecht, Routledge Focus, February 2025.

Statutory Interpretation in Aotearoa New Zealand: A Good Practice Guide by Ross Carter, LexisNexis, September 2024.

The Routledge Handbook of Tourism and Indigenous Peoples by Richard Butler and Anna Carr, Routledge, Taylor and Francis, August 2024.

Capturing News, Capturing Democracy: Trump and the Voice of America, by Kate Wright, Martin Scott and Mel Bunce, Oxford University Press, April 2024.

Alumni: if you have recently published a book please email mag.editor@otago.ac.nz

For further information:
Otago University Press
oup.nz | publicity@otago.ac.nz



Out of the Box: 25 Deaf and disabled artists, activists and adventurers from Aotearoa New Zealand

By Trish Harris
Illustrations by Benjamin Ackerman and Peter Woodfield
Otago University Press, July 2026

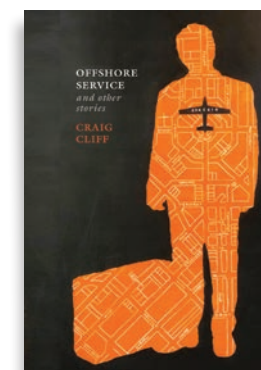
'Deaf or disabled people get put in a box. It's frustrating, it's tiring and it's boring. I want that box to be broken open!' – Mojo Mathers

In *Out of the Box*, an illustrated book for readers aged 12+, author Trish Harris shares the stories of 25 Deaf and disabled New Zealanders – artists, activists and adventurers – who have broken open the box and claimed their space.

'They've put a flag in the ground, as in the drawing on the cover,' writes Harris. 'They've said, "I'm doing life my way" and "this is what I need, in order to be who I am".'

The second half of the book provides a detailed timeline of significant Deaf and disability milestones in Aotearoa New Zealand, from the 1840s to the present day. This little-known history anchors the stories in the events and attitudes of their time and enables readers to see how political decisions and social progress have a real impact on people's lives.

The 25 New Zealanders profiled include people who swim, cycle, act, protest, make films and music, write books, perform live comedy, ski, dance, make laws, teach, travel, invent things and more. *Out of the Box* celebrates both big achievements and everyday life. It shows that many of the mountains disabled people face are created by society – and that those mountains can be moved.



Offshore Service and Other Stories

By Craig Cliff
Otago University Press, August 2026

'But I couldn't go home just yet. I would not be a man in anyone's eyes. That's how I wound up working for Anton, servicing the coal ships stranded off the coast.' – from 'Offshore Service'

In *Offshore Service and Other Stories*, award-winning author and Otago staff member Craig Cliff explores the emotional, economic, cultural and climatic forces that drive our decisions.

Farmers search for purpose on holiday in Fiji. A well-heeled Dunedin suburb receives an influx of refugees. Tensions flare at an Anzac Day barbecue in Perth. Playing out in recognisable settings these stories follow characters who find themselves beyond familiar shores, struggling to reconcile the passage of time, thwarted aspirations and unexpected responsibilities. What unfolds is explored with humour, heart and hopefulness through a mix of classic storytelling and innovative forms.

Offshore Service is a beautifully written and thoroughly readable collection about life here and now.

Space forecast

A \$10.5 million MBIE Endeavour grant will enable a team from the Department of Physics to build critical capability for space-based climate monitoring, helping to ensure the accuracy of global weather forecasts to reduce financial, infrastructure and human losses.

Professor Harald Schwefel, Dr Mallika Suresh and Associate Professor Annika Seppala are developing an ozone-monitoring instrument that they aim to launch into space from New Zealand in the future.

Schwefel says the large NASA satellite currently used to monitor global atmosphere is reaching the end of its life. Otago's photonic sensor will have lower size, weight and power (SWaP) requirements that will make it a cheaper alternative.

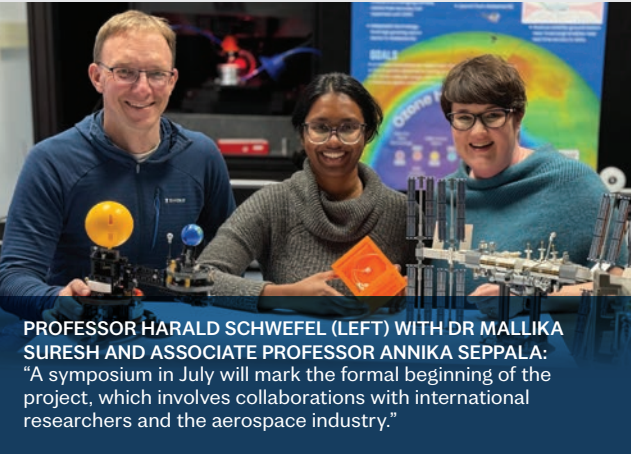
"A symposium in July will mark the formal beginning of the project, which involves collaborations with international researchers and the aerospace industry," Schwefel says.

Programme Manager Associate Professor Carla Meledandri, of the Department of Chemistry, says the research team will tap into multi-disciplinary expertise.

"Our photonics research team is working with engineers at Paihau Robinson Research Institute and with Kea Aerospace to ensure the photonics-based ozone sensor will be compatible with Kea's solar-powered gliders, and our atmospheric science team is collaborating with Earth Sciences New Zealand to ensure we collect the right data with their stratosphere balloon," Meledandri says.

These experiments will test and validate the photonic sensor outside the lab and be the first step towards building a device that could continue to track the global distribution of greenhouse gases like ozone and water vapour.

The data will be used to improve forecasts of extreme weather events.



PROFESSOR HARALD SCHWEFEL (LEFT) WITH DR MALLIKA SURESH AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ANNIKA SEPPALA: "A symposium in July will mark the formal beginning of the project, which involves collaborations with international researchers and the aerospace industry."

Migraine mission

Improving the treatment of migraine is both a personal and professional quest for Dr Fiona Imlach, a public health doctor and researcher at the Faculty of Medicine - Wellington, who has had migraine attacks for most of her life.

Imlach begins a two-year study this year to learn more about those who are missing out on appropriate migraine diagnosis and treatment in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Her research is funded by the Neurological Foundation and aims to raise awareness of the disabling condition, which affects more than 730,000 New Zealanders.

Imlach says half of those who experience the symptoms of migraine have never been diagnosed, with those of Māori and Pacific ethnicity most likely to have never had a diagnosis.

Inappropriate treatment of migraine is also of concern, as the overuse of painkillers, particularly those that are opioid-based can make the condition worse.

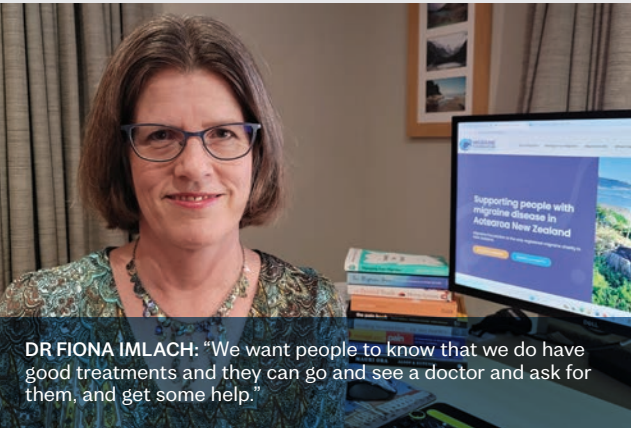
"If you don't treat migraine well it can progress to chronic migraine, which is where the headaches become very frequent, once every other day, or even more than that, and that is very disabling. I've had chronic migraine, so I know how hard it is."

She hopes the study will help raise awareness of new treatments, which have been specifically developed for migraine and which can prevent attacks as well as treat them when they do occur.

The stigma around migraine means many of those with the condition suffer in silence, she says.

"A lot of people don't really want to talk about it, or they go to their doctor and they get told, 'oh there's nothing we can do'.

"We want people to know that we do have good treatments and they can go and see a doctor and ask for them, and get some help."



DR FIONA IMLACH: "We want people to know that we do have good treatments and they can go and see a doctor and ask for them, and get some help."

Regenerative tourism

The Development West Coast Regenerative Tourism Working Group provided students with a valuable research opportunity exploring the potential of regenerative tourism for the region.

Undertaken as a summer project, the research was supported by the expertise of Geography's Professor Etienne Nel and Associate Professor Sean Connelly, and Tourism's Professor Brent Lovelock.

Connelly says the West Coast region has been grappling with its dependence on industries subject to boom-and-bust cycles.

"Tourism is one option to diversify the economy, but even mass tourism can be considered extractive – hence the appeal of regenerative tourism."

But what is regenerative tourism? Lovelock describes it as tourism that gives back.

"The idea is to give back socially, culturally and environmentally. Importantly, it's informed and driven by the specific needs of the local community and their environment."

The research was undertaken by three undergraduate students, Victoria Couper, Keira Hill and Annabelle Pattenden. They explored the economic development options available to small, resource-based towns, examined how regenerative tourism might be applied in these contexts and identified a set of indicators to assess its potential impact. Their findings were consolidated and presented to the working group.

The student researchers were all supported by summer scholarships

funded by the University and Scenic Hotels, the latter administered through Development West Coast. The trio says the project was a great opportunity to contribute to work that is helping to make a real difference to the region's communities and environment.



PROFESSOR BRENT LOVELOCK AT A WEST COAST TOURISM SUMMIT: "The idea is to give back socially, culturally and environmentally."

Behind the opinions

Investigating how people form their opinions on public health measures is at the heart of a four-year project being undertaken by Dr John Kerr from the Faculty of Medicine – Wellington.

Kerr has been awarded a Royal Society Te Apārangi Mana Tūānuku Research Leader Fellowship to study what is driving the disagreements in New Zealand over public health interventions.

Kerr says his interest in the topic comes back to the Covid-19 pandemic, when many people developed strong opinions about vaccinations, and other public health measures.

"There are some policies like compulsory seat belts, which most people are on board with, and then there are others that we see a lot of disagreement over, that people get quite polarised about, and so the overarching idea of my research is to try and find where that disagreement comes from."

Kerr says misinformation is one of the factors driving dissent over public health measures, but there are other issues too, such as when people have libertarian views and are averse to being told what to do by the government.

He hopes learning more about the reasons for people's opinions will help guide policymakers in developing new public health measures.

"It's great to get people to try and make good individual choices for their health, but the biggest gains for improving the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders are at a systems level. They are about policies, and the

choices we make as a nation.

"My research is about trying to inform that approach, and understanding how we choose the policies that are going to be the most acceptable, that have the best social licence, and then working out how to talk about them in a way that ensures we don't create conflict over them, but actually bring on board as many people as possible."



DR JOHN KERR: "... the overarching idea of my research is to try and find where that disagreement comes from."

Photo: Luke Pilkinton-Ching

Advancing the diagnosis of Crohn’s disease

A research team from the University’s Christchurch campus has secured a major international grant to advance diagnostic tools for Crohn’s disease (CD), a condition rising rapidly worldwide.

The US-based Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust has awarded US\$1.39 million (NZ\$2.43 million) to support a three-year collaborative study led by the Faculty of Medicine – Christchurch.

Principal Investigator Professor Richard Gearry says the funding will enable the development of faster, more accurate and more affordable diagnostic tools for CD.

“We know early and accurate diagnosis is critical for people living with Crohn’s disease, but current testing methods can be expensive, slow, and difficult to access in many settings,” Gearry says.

“This research gives us the opportunity to develop a simpler, more affordable diagnostic tool that could improve care not only in New Zealand, but internationally, including in countries where access to specialist testing is limited.”

The study will focus on evaluating myeloperoxidase (MPO) enzyme activity in faeces as a novel biomarker. Researchers aim to improve on existing faecal calprotectin testing which, while widely used, remains expensive and slow. Earlier Otago-led research has shown faecal MPO to be a promising and accurate indicator of inflammatory bowel disease activity.

By testing MPO’s effectiveness across diverse populations, the team, involving collaborators in Australia and India, hopes to develop a simple, low-cost, point-of-care diagnostic.

If successful, the research could offer a scalable solution for both industrial and developing countries facing increasing CD prevalence.



PROFESSOR RICHARD GEARRY: “This research gives us the opportunity to develop a simpler, more affordable diagnostic tool that could improve care not only in New Zealand, but internationally ...”

Being raised dual heritage

Cultural identity plays a critical role in shaping the development and wellbeing of tamariki.

While having dual ethnicities offers the richness of two cultures, some insights also suggest that this may lead to identity confusion and negative effects on mental health. For example, people who identify solely as ‘Pacific’ score higher on the Pacific Identity and Wellbeing Scale than those with mixed Pacific and non-Pacific identities.

Dr Wahineata Smith’s research is about understanding and celebrating the richness of dual heritage identities.

“Celebrating it is to be proud of it,” Smith (Ngāti Korokī Kahukura, Ngāti Ranginui) says.

Smith (Te Tumu - School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies), began a four-year Mana Tūāpapa Future Leader Fellowship in April.

She will use mixed research methods, including working directly with families raising children with dual Māori and Tongan heritage, to better understand what is happening and make an intergenerational impact.

The project also aims to ensure systems, from education to health, recognise and support the realities of families raising the next generation of children with dual ethnicities.

Current institutional systems often fail to capture the complexity of dual identities, frequently reducing individuals to a single ‘tick box’ ethnicity, Smith says.

“If you’re more than one ethnicity, only the first one is counted in many

cases. This erases multi-ethnic identity and overlooks the nuances of multi-ethnic experiences.”

Through her research, she seeks to reshape how data collection works to address these systemic gaps.

“To best serve all people, including those with dual or multiple ethnicities, there needs to be a holistic approach in our education, health system and justice systems, rather than thinking one-size-fits-all.”



DR WAHINEATA SMITH WITH HER DAUGHTER, MĀHINA: “... there needs to be a holistic approach in our education, health system and justice systems, rather than thinking one-size-fits-all.”

Reviewing the RDTI

Professor Conor O’Kane, Head of the Bachelor of Entrepreneurship programme, collaborated with Motu, the Economic and Public Policy and Research Agency, on the first review of the Research and Development Tax Incentive (RDTI).

Introduced in 2019 to replace a growth grants scheme that was being phased out, the RDTI aims to encourage business innovation by offering a tax credit on eligible research and development.

Focusing on scheme compliance costs and administration, O’Kane led the qualitative component of the review. This involved interviewing more than 80 participants from businesses across a range of research and development expenditure bands, professional advisory firms, as well as agencies involved with scheme administration and governance including the IRD, Callaghan Innovation and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE).

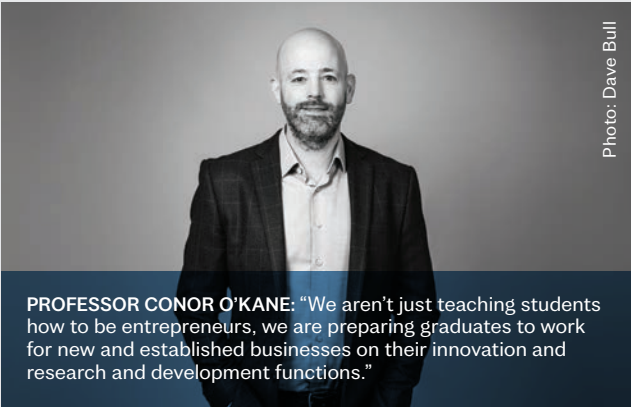
While the analysis found that on balance compliance costs were more than offset by the ability to access research and development support, it highlighted that firms with lower levels of eligible research and development expenditure can be disproportionately impacted by these costs.

O’Kane says his contribution to the MBIE-funded study and the resulting report tabled in Parliament in late 2025 was “challenging but exciting given its direct relevance to policy formulation”.

“It was fulfilling to see the close links between what we teach and

what businesses are working on and talking about regarding innovation and the importance of research and development expertise.

“We aren’t just teaching students how to be entrepreneurs, we are preparing graduates to work for new and established businesses on their innovation and research and development functions. To hear firms speaking the same language as we are in tertiary education was affirming.”



PROFESSOR CONOR O’KANE: “We aren’t just teaching students how to be entrepreneurs, we are preparing graduates to work for new and established businesses on their innovation and research and development functions.”

Vitamin C and skin

A recent breakthrough study from researchers at the University’s Faculty of Medicine – Christchurch, is attracting attention around the globe.

Published in the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*, the research demonstrates that skin vitamin C levels are closely linked to the amount of vitamin C that we eat, with a strong link established between vitamin C intake, blood plasma levels and skin function – particularly collagen production and epidermal renewal.

Led by Professor Margreet Vissers, the study was conducted in two phases. The first established the relationship between plasma and skin vitamin C levels using tissue samples from surgical patients. The second phase involved a controlled dietary intervention, with skin samples and functional assessments taken before and after increased vitamin C intake.

The study examined two dozen healthy adults across Aotearoa New Zealand and Germany. Participants consumed two SunGold™ kiwifruit daily – equivalent to about 250mg of vitamin C – over an eight-week period.

The results showed a marked increase in vitamin C levels within the skin, closely mirroring changes in levels found in the bloodstream. Advanced skin function testing in Germany, including ultrasound measurements, confirmed highly significant improvements in skin thickness – a key indicator of collagen synthesis – and enhanced cellular regeneration of the outer skin layer.

Due to its water-soluble nature, vitamin C is poorly absorbed through

the skin barrier. The study shows efficient delivery to the skin via the bloodstream, and thereby questions the usefulness of adding vitamin C to topical creams.

“Our findings show that by increasing dietary vitamin C intake, we were able to significantly raise vitamin C levels in the skin and observe measurable improvements in skin thickness and renewal,” Vissers says. “It highlights that healthy skin is supported primarily from within, through a consistent diet rich in vitamin C-containing foods.”



Faculty of Medicine – Christchurch research using kiwifruit shows that skin vitamin C levels are closely linked to the amount of vitamin C that we eat.



Reece King, *The Great Hall*, 2025, acrylic enamel on canvas, 2660 x 7400 mm (two parts), as shown in *The Ogee & Manaia*, Hocken Gallery, 14 March - 1 August 2026.

Photo: Reece King

Behind every Fellow



Imogen Taylor, *Sapphic Fragments* installation view, Hocken Gallery, 1 February - 28 March 2020.

Photo: Iain Frengley

The list of artists who have held the University's Frances Hodgkins Fellowship over the past 60 years is a 'who's who' of New Zealand art. The prestigious residency is supported by the Hocken Library with its team of experts, extraordinary art collection and purpose-built exhibition gallery.

HOCKEN LIBRARY HEAD CURATOR ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY ROBYN NOTMAN

describes the Hocken as a default department for Frances Hodgkins Fellows.

"It offers them a professional and pastoral space on campus, where they can find collegiality and draw on the expertise of our curatorial staff."

Since 1980, the Hocken has supported the Fellows by presenting a curated exhibition of their artwork in its exhibition gallery.

"The production of an associated illustrated catalogue, expanding the artist's practice beyond physical space and time, has also become a significant part of the Fellowship."

Art historian Warren Feeney has previously observed Fellowship selection panels were "consistently astute in their choices and generous in considering what the country's art might possibly be about".

The Hocken's art collection was built around Dr Hocken's original gift, with a focus on works which recorded or illustrated elements of Aotearoa New Zealand's history.

This changed in 1958 when poet Charles Brasch, a member of the Hocken Pictures subcommittee, updated the art collection policy to include New Zealand modernist and contemporary art.

Notman says this new direction enhanced the collection's "currency", or contemporary significance, and relationship with the arts and art audiences.

"It is no coincidence that the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship was established around this time. It added an inspirational and ambitious component into the mix and was a planned part of Brasch and others' overall strategy to foster contemporary art in Ōtepoti, Dunedin.

"The diversity of world views and

approaches to art-making represented by recent Fellows, in particular, demonstrates the Fellowship and Hocken's alignment with the University's direction, while also reflecting the wider cultural moment and contemporary views."

Jeffrey Harris, one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most highly regarded painters, was the 1977 Fellow. While he just missed out on the exhibition opportunity, as a dedicated gallery was not built until 1979, he says the Fellowship alone raised his profile to a new level.

"The publicity, exposure and critical acceptance of my work was significant."

Being self-taught, Harris says the recognition which came with being the Frances Hodgkins Fellow was particularly valuable for opening doors.

"I met many people – directors, curators, critics and collectors from other centres. My work was seen by a larger audience, some of whom were not previously aware of my work at all."

When the Hocken moved into its current building in Anzac Ave in 1998, a 188m² exhibition gallery was incorporated into the build.

The 2019 Fellow, Imogen Taylor, says she had been exhibiting for about 10 years in dealer and public galleries, and artist run initiatives, but the Fellowship exhibition was a "big deal" for her and the largest space she had exhibited in.

"There's a lot of trust that goes with being a Fellow – that you'll do something worthy of the space. Robyn and the Hocken team were really supportive."

The catalogue was another first for Taylor.

"I'd never had that level of financial support to produce a catalogue. It gave me an opportunity to work with Dr Joanne

Drayton, an art historian I'd looked up to for years. That catalogue has stood the test of time."

Acting Hocken Curator Art Nick Austin was the 2012 Fellow. He says the freedom of a no strings attached 12-month opportunity, alongside the exhibition at the end of the Fellowship, was ideal for him.

"The exhibition gave me something to work towards. I am a deadline-oriented artist."

"Some of my recent studio work has returned to the found-object and assemblage work I was doing in the Fellowship year – and which I presented in my exhibition *The Liquid Dossier* – so in that sense the experience feels quite fresh, even if it was 13 years ago."

Most recent Fellow Reece King's exhibition *The Ogee & Manaia* is hanging in the Hocken gallery until 1 August 2026. He says walking into the gallery with all his works up felt surreal.

"The Hocken gallery and its team are the perfect companions for the year-long journey. The Hocken Collection provided endless inspiration and the weekly or so curator studio visits were genuinely valuable and wholesome."

"I look forward to the next Frances Hodgkins Fellow moving into the studio so I too can drop by with coffee and share in many more creative and exciting ideas."

While the Fellowship was paused for 2026 due to funding constraints, it has been re-instated for 2027, supported by a grant from the Russell Henderson Charitable Trust. Additional support is still needed to ensure the Fellowship can continue annually in perpetuity (see page 52 for details).

BRIGID FEELY

Mana-to-mana agreement



The University and mana whenua have strengthened their ties – with the signing of a mana-to-mana agreement last August.

The agreement – *Te Kaha Uia Te Kaha* – was signed by the chairs of Kā Rūnaka ki Ōtākou Nadia Wesley-Smith (Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou), Justin Tipa (Te Rūnanga o Moeraki), Matapura Ellison (Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki Puketeraki), and University Chancellor Trish Oakley (pictured above, left to right).

The agreement acknowledges the three rūnaka, known collectively for the purposes of the Agreement as Kā Rūnaka, as primary Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners.

By signing the Agreement, the University has affirmed its commitment to further deepening and strengthening its relationship with Kā Rūnaka.

Oakley says it is not a partnership that is designed for immediate gain.

“Instead, it marks our solid foundation of shared values, a common vision, and our commitment to the development of a Te Tiriti-led University.”

New PVC Sciences



The University has welcomed Professor Charles Brennan as the new Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Sciences) (pictured above).

Previously the Chief Scientific Director of the Food and Nutrition Hub at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia, Brennan joined Otago in March.

He was drawn to Otago's proud heritage as Aotearoa New Zealand's first university and its

commitment to bold, future-focused research.

Professor Brennan replaces Professor Richard Barker who has moved into a new role, driving the University's strategy for the Queenstown Lakes District (see pages 16 – 18).

Enrolments up

Student enrolments are up by more than 5 per cent at the University of Otago – Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka with growth across the board for 2026.

March figures placed the total number of equivalent full-time students (EFTS) at 19,007, compared to 18,018 at the same time last year.

The figure reflects increases in both domestic and international EFTS, as well as in both commencing and returning students.

The University typically receives a further enrolment boost of about 1,000 EFTS at the start of Semester 2. The final rate of enrolment growth for the year will be determined then and can be impacted by external events.

Student swaps

In a first-of-its-kind collaboration, the University of Otago – Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka, Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington and AUT – Te Wānanga Aronoui O Tāmaki Makau Rau, have launched a pilot programme, Uni Exchange Aotearoa, giving second-year domestic undergraduates the opportunity to experience a different New Zealand city by swapping universities for a semester.

The programme offers adventurous students an enjoyable academic experience in a welcoming city, while improving their skills and employability.

For the pilot, each university has offered a total of 10 places for students to swap cities in semester 2. They can choose courses from a wide range of subjects that fit their major, from Classics and Criminology to Marketing and Maths.

Afternoon tea with the VC

Hundreds of parents and caregivers of first-year taura took up the invitation to share afternoon tea with Vice-Chancellor Grant Robertson in February.

The inaugural event – held on the Clocktower Lawn – was an informal way to welcome families into the University community.

“Starting University is a major step for our

first-year taura, many of whom have never lived away from home before. It's also a big step for their whanaunga, who may have questions or concerns about what happens next,” Robertson (pictured below) says.

“This event gave us a chance to extend manaakitanga, talk about the supports Otago offers, and reassure people that their tamariki are in good hands.”



Banks' Florilegium

For the first time, individual prints from the notable Banks' Florilegium – a rare collection of engravings of plants collected by Sir Joseph Banks on Captain James Cook's first voyage (1760s) around the world – are available to purchase, with a share of the sales going to the Friends of the Hocken Collections.

Banks' Florilegium comprises the 743 botanical engravings of plants collected by Sir Joseph Banks and Dr Daniel Carl Solander on Captain James Cook's first voyage round the world in His Majesty's barque Endeavour, 1768 – 1771, 143 of which are New Zealand plants.

Friends of the Hocken Collections Chairperson Lorraine Isaacs says the opportunity to fundraise through the sale of Banks' Florilegium prints is an honour. Every print purchased contributes 40 per cent of the net sale price to the Friends of the Hocken Collections.

“The more people purchase, the more funds we will have to support projects like our regular Hocken Award,” Isaacs says.

See www.alecto-historical-editions.com and use the code – FOHC10 – to receive a 10% discount on each print.



Appointments

Chris Hopkins as University of Otago Council member

Dr Peter Bramley as University of Otago Council member

Distinguished Professor **Greg Cook** as Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (see more on pages 6 – 8)

Emeritus Professor **James Maclaurin** as Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

Dr **Megan Pōtiki** as Te Pou Tiriti (see more on pages 9 - 11)

Professor **Richard Barker** as Establishment Director, University of Otago Queenstown/Lakes District Project (see more on pages 16 – 18)

Professor **Charles Brennan** as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Sciences) (see more on page 44)

Professor **Maree Thyne** as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Commerce/Business)

Associate Professor **Cathy Chapple** as Dean, School of Physiotherapy

Associate Professor **Ailsa McGregor** as inaugural Head of the Faculty of Health Sciences Professional Programmes

Takiwai Russell-Camp as Associate Dean Māori, Faculty of Medicine

Katie McEwan as Chief People Officer

Awards and achievements

Four academic staff received 2026 University of Otago Teaching Excellence Awards: Associate Professor **Carolina Loch** (Dentistry); Senior Teaching Fellow **Nicole Power** (Biochemistry); Pūkenga Matua **Paia Taani** (Te Tumu – School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies); and Associate Professor **Esther Willing** (Health Sciences).

The University's highest research honour, the Distinguished Research Medal went to **Peter Fineran** (Microbiology and Immunology) (pictured below) in 2025 for his work understanding phage viruses.



The 2025 Rowheath Trust Award and Carl Smith Medal, which recognises outstanding research performance by an early career academic, went to Associate Professor **Andrew Reynolds** (Medicine) (see pages 19 – 21 for more on his work).

The **ASPIRE Aotearoa Research Centre** received the 2025 Research Group Award.

Four individuals were recognised with Early Career Research Awards for Distinction in Research in 2025: Dr **Zihan Liu** (Accountancy and Finance), Dr **Graham McCulloch** (Zoology), Dr **Xun Xiao** (Mathematics and Statistics) and Dr **Joon Kim** (Physiology).

The 2025 Otago Māori Early Career Awards for Distinction in Research recipients were Dr **Megan Leask** (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe) (Physiology), and **Katrina Pōtiki Bryant** (Waitaha, Kāti Māmoe, Kāi Tahu) (School of Physiotherapy) (pictured below).



The 2025 University of Otago staff awards celebrated outstanding achievements across several categories. Awards for Exceptional Performance by Professional Staff went to: **Carol Forbes** (Specialist for Academic Committees and Services – Humanities), **Charlotte Ball** (Executive Assistant to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor – Sciences); **Craig Marshall** (Senior Manager Financial Systems and Projects – Financial Services Division); and the **Project DOUG and AVA team** (a combined Continuous Improvement and Student Experience Admissions team). The Vice-Chancellor's Award went to **Carol Forbes**. The Health and Safety Initiative Award (Individual) went to **Annabel Cole** (Campus Watch), while the team award went to **SAFE-D** (Safety Awareness For Everyone – Dentistry). The Wellbeing Award (Individual) went to **Tracie Leckie**.

Dr **Zoe Tasma** (Pharmacology and Toxicology) won the 2025 Otago Innovation Proof of Concept Award for her innovative approach to developing next generation

therapeutics for widespread and debilitating neurological conditions.

Four Otago scholars had their academic impact recognised by the Royal Society Te Apārangi in April 2026. Professors **Tim Anderson**, **Michael Baker**, **John Crump** and **Peter Dearden** have been selected as Fellows of the Society's Academy and were officially inducted at a ceremony in Wellington.

Three Otago researchers received significant Royal Society Te Apārangi awards in 2025. Professor **Cliff Abraham** (Psychology) won the prestigious Rutherford Medal; **Helena Abolins-Thompson** (Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Ngāi Tahu, Rangitāne o Tamaki nui a rua) (Surgery and Critical Care, Wellington) won the Te Kōpūnui Māori Research Award; and Distinguished Professor **Jacinta Ruru** (Raukawa, Ngāti Ranginui) won the Humanities Aronui Medal.

The Health Research Council (HRC) honoured three Otago research groups for transformative health interventions of significant national and global impact in 2025: Professor **Logan Walker** (Pathology) won the HRC's prestigious Liley Medal; Professors **Ben Wheeler** (Paediatrics and Child Health, Dunedin) and **Martin de Bock** (Paediatrics, Christchurch) and their wider team won the HRC Beaven Medal; and a new honour – the Catalyst in the Community Award – went to Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou Taurite Tū Limited research team led by **Katrina Pōtiki Bryant** (Physiotherapy).

Associate Professor **Nic Rawlence** (Zoology) (pictured below) received the New Zealand Association of Scientists' Cranwell Medal for excellence in communicating science to the general public.



Emeritus Professor Sir **Alan Mark** (Botany) received the 2025 BLAKE Medal for his outstanding contribution to New Zealand as a leading plant ecologist, lifelong environmentalist, and champion of science-based conservation.

Distinguished Professor **Philippa Howden-Chapman** (Public Health, Wellington) was honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the International Society for Urban Health (see pages 34 – 35 for more).

Associate Professor Dr **Rob Griffiths** (Medicine, Wellington) was awarded the 2025 Aerospace Medical Association John Ernstring Award.

Professor **Steven Jackson** (School of Physical Education, Sport and Exercise Sciences) received the International Sociology of Sport Association Lifetime Honorary Member Award July 2025.

Professor **Siân Halcrow** (Anatomy) (pictured below) became the first New Zealander to receive a British Academy Global Professorship in September 2025.



Professor **Dawn Coates** won the Women in Science Award for Distinguished Female Mentor by the International Association for Dental Research in March 2026.

Distinguished Professor **Michelle Thompson-Fawcett** (Geography) won the prestigious Australasian Cities Research Network (ACRN) Medal in February 2026.

Professor **Craig Rodger** (Physics) won the International Union of Radio Science's (URSI) 2026 Karl Rawer Gold Medal in May 2026.

Professor **Roslyn Kemp** (Microbiology and Immunology) won the Derrick Rowley medal from the Australian and New Zealand Society for Immunology in January 2026.

One hundred and sixty-one of Otago's scientists were named in the World's Top 2% Scientists' list released by Stanford University in October 2025. Professor **Christine Winterbourn**, a Principal Investigator at the Mātai Hāora – Centre for Redox Biology and Medicine

at the Christchurch campus, was Otago's best ranked scientist at number 1,578.

The Otago University Rowing Club was named Club of the Year at the 2025 Rowing New Zealand awards.

2026 New Year Honours:

Thirteen staff and alumni from a variety of fields were recognised in this year's New Year Honours list.

DNZM: Professor **Helen Danesh-Meyer**, CNZM, for services to ophthalmology (see page 48).

KNZM: Professor **Graham Le Gros**, CNZM, for services to medical science.

CNZM: Professor **Beverley-Anne Lawton**, ONZM, for services to women's health.

ONZM: **Frances Hartnett**, for services to people with disabilities; **Lynley Lloyd**, for services to renal nutrition; Professor **Roderick MacLeod**, MNZM, for services to palliative care; **James Miller**, for services to corporate governance; and **Lorraine Moller**, for services to athletics.

MNZM: **Deborah Fraser**, for services to mental health and youth; and **Alexandra Pasley**, for services to education.

KSM: **Elizabeth Henry**, for services to the community and sport; **Peter Maunder**, for services to athletics; and The Reverend **Wayne Toleafoa**, for services to Pacific communities.

Kings Birthday Honours:

Twenty-two alumni and staff were recognised in the 2026 King's Birthday Honours list. They were:

ONZM: Associate Professor **Nicola Austin**, for services to children's health; **Suzannah Bates**, for services to cricket and basketball; **Earle Kirton**, for services to rugby; Dr **Yvonne LeFort**, for services to Breastfeeding Medicine; Dr **Colin Mantell**, for services to health education, obstetrics and gynaecology; **Scott O'Donnell**, for services to business; and **Rodney Wong**, for services to business and the community.

MNZM: Emeritus Professor **Peter Adams**, for services to music and music education; Emeritus Professor **Gilbert Barbezat**, for services to gastroenterology; **Daniel Buckingham**, for services to people with disabilities and wheelchair rugby; Dr **Luk Chin**, for services to health and harness racing; **Kendall Flutey**,

for services to business and financial literacy; Dr **Mark Fraundorfer**, for services to health, particularly men's health; **Charles Norrish**, for services to education; **Michele Poole**, for services to Fire and Emergency New Zealand; Professor **Marc Shaw**, for services to travel health; and **Trevor Spittle**, for services to athletics.

KSM: **Amelia Bresanello**, for services to the community; Ms **Johanna (Hanny) Naus**, for services to seniors and rainbow communities; Dr **Shanthi Selvakumar**, for services to migrant and refugee communities; **Noel Walker** for services to Scouts and the community; and **Susan Walker**, for services to Scouts and the community.

Australian Honours:

AM: Associate Professor **David Austin**, for significant service to intensive care medicine, sport and education.

Obituaries

Emeritus Professor David Bell (College of Education)

Emeritus Professor Eric Espiner (Christchurch Heart Institute)

Professor Mac Gardner (Honorary Adjunct Professor in Medical Genetics)

Professor Bruce Harris (former Dean of Law at Otago)

Peter Larsen (Surgery and Critical Care, Wellington)

Craig Lawson (ITS)

Emerita Professor Helen Leach (Anthropology)

Emeritus Professor Alan Musgrave (Philosophy)

Professor Paul Smith (Pharmacology)

Dr Philip Silva (founder of the Dunedin Study)

Glenn Wadsworth (Student Experience)

Andy Walne (former head of Caroline Freeman College)

*Ka rere ana kā mihi ki te huka mate, kia rātou kua mene atu ki tua o te ārai, ki te paepae nui o Hawaiiki.
Ko rātou tēnā kua wheturakitia ki raro i te maru o Pōhutukawa i tēnei wā o Matariki.
Koutou kua riro ki te kauhakanui o Hine-nui-te-pō.
Haere, haere, haere atu rā.*

As well as celebrating 150 years of teacher education in Dunedin (see pages 27-31), the University is also marking 100 years of Music and 50 years of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme.

100 100 years of Music

A RANGE OF CONCERTS AND EVENTS, AS WELL AS THE LAUNCH OF A BOOK, are all part of a package to mark the centenary of music teaching at the University of Otago – Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka.

Nowadays, music is part of the School of Performing Arts, which also incorporates theatre and dance.

Head of School, Associate Professor Jennifer Cattermole, says the centenary working party has pulled together a range of events including lunchtime concerts, and an exhibition at the Hocken Library.

"The big, splashy main celebration is 25 and 26 September – the Friday and Saturday. There will also be a couple of contemporary concerts, a classical concert and a series of workshops. It's going to be all go."

One of the special aspects of the centenary is the opportunity to work with the Dunedin Symphony Orchestra (DSO) which is celebrating its 60th anniversary.

Many current students and staff are in the DSO and over the years it has proved a great training ground.

Meanwhile, former staff member and honorary Senior Lecturer, Dr Ian Chapman, has been editing and collating a book, which

will feature writing from a range of current and former staff, as well as alumni, about their experiences at Otago.

"We wanted to avoid a dry, chronological, 'this happened on this date' kind of a deal. We wanted it to be more about the people involved and what Otago meant to them, rather than the nuts and bolts of how the degree works," he says.

"In addition, we've got people writing about areas of expertise, such as Anthony Ritchie's written about composition. Terence Dennis has written about classical piano at Otago, and I've written about the contemporary programme."

Chapman has also been able to dig out archival material from Music's early days, including the University of Otago Council meeting minutes that confirmed Victor Galway to the first lectureship in 1926.

Those minutes suggest there was a level of excitement about music being taught at Otago. The University had already tested the water through a popular musical appreciation night class.

Check out the celebration details here:



MARK WRIGHT

50 50 years of MBA

IN 1976, NEW ZEALAND'S REPORT CARD BOASTED AN INTRIGUING MIX of new developments: The Matrimonial Property Act brought equality to the sharing of marital assets; 'New Zealand Day' became 'Waitangi Day'; McDonalds opened its inaugural Kiwi outlet; and the nation's first Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme was launched at the University of Otago.

Now turning 50, that Otago MBA is celebrating five decades' worth of graduates who have deployed their nous across business, government, and the not-for-profit sector, both here and overseas.

A sample of Otago's 1,319 MBA alumni shows the breadth of the degree's career scope: Graeme Hart (New Zealand's most prominent business leader and a man who recently donated \$10 million dollars to support Otago's Faculty of Dentistry); Bridget Legnavsky (President/CEO of Sugar Bowl Corporation, a ski resort and real estate company in California); Dr Uluomato'otua

Saulaulu Aiono, ONZM (trailblazing businessman, philanthropist and New Zealand's first Pacific Islander MBA graduate); Mike Siermans (Chief Executive, Federated Farmers); and Metua Bates (Director Public Health, Cook Islands Ministry of Health).

Over the years, Otago's MBA has consistently rated highly in the QS World University Rankings. The online MBA is ranked first in Aotearoa, as well as best in the world for 'classroom experience', while the on-campus MBA shares top billing nationally.

The MBA team is hosting a series of 50th anniversary regional gatherings in 2026, culminating in the Otago MBA 50th Anniversary Celebration Weekend in Dunedin (12-14 November).

Check out the celebration details here:



CLAIRE FINLAYSON

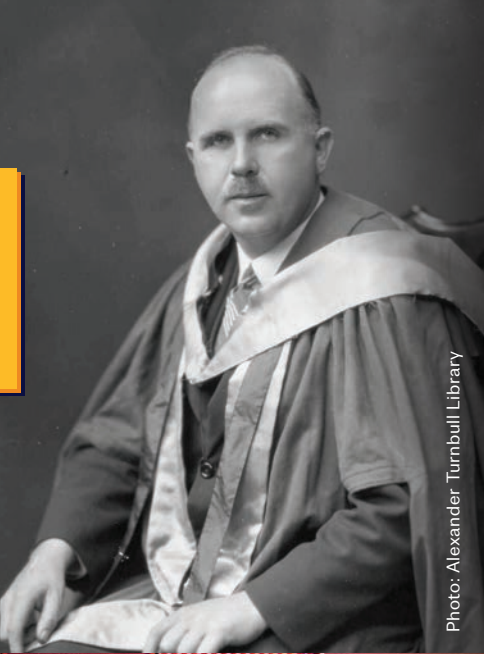


Photo: Alexander Turnbull Library



Photo: Hocken MS-5249/0131

Music through the years (top to bottom): Otago's first Music Lecturer, Professor Victor Galway; Dr Graeme Downes and students in the University's Albany Street Studios c.2001; and Te Korokoro o te Tūi, the University's Performing Arts centre which was officially opened in 2021.



Photo: Frank J. Visser Photography Ltd

The University of Otago – Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka aims to transform lives, connect communities and nurture the environment – locally, nationally, in the Pacific and around the world.

Saving sight

Otago alumna and recently appointed Dame, Professor Helen Danesh-Meyer, is most proud of all the young doctors and scientists she has mentored.

As the first female New Zealand Professor of Ophthalmology (the medical branch focused on the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of eye disorders) and the country's second-ever female professor in any surgical specialty, she has had a ground-breaking career.

"I think the one thing that I would hold closest to my heart is the people I have trained – and the opportunity to continue to work and collaborate with them as colleagues."

Danesh-Meyer says her time at Otago helped shape both how she thinks and her approach to knowledge – in particular teaching from Professor Anthony Molteno, who encouraged students to challenge long-held ideas.

"Professor Molteno's view was simple: authority isn't evidence. Just because someone said it, doesn't mean you should believe it. Challenge the 'fact' yourself.

"So, that was a philosophy that was ingrained in me from an early age. I really enjoyed being free and not encumbered to follow certain thinking, and I think that's made me feel comfortable challenging ideas when I read a textbook or an article to think, 'actually what does it come from and why hold on to that so strongly?'"

Danesh-Meyer chose to devote her career to ophthalmology as the eye is a complex and specialised part of the brain and it is something no one wants to lose.

"In New Zealand we've designed the fastest portable camera in the world that can measure the eye at 500 frames per second, and can capture ocular signatures or biomarkers of concussion and other neurological diseases that we hadn't seen



PROFESSOR DAME HELEN DANESH-MEYER: "... my research reflects a broader shift in medicine: toward earlier detection, more precise monitoring, and approaches that can be applied widely."

previously. We're looking at developing that into an accessible point-of-care device so that schools and sporting clubs can provide people who knock their head with an immediate assessment."

Danesh-Meyer met her husband, dental specialist Michael Danesh-Meyer (MDS, 1994), in a first-year chemistry lecture at Otago.

"Otago holds a very special place for us and we love coming back, as there are so many fond memories on so many different levels."

She was made a Fellow of the Royal Society Te Apārangi in 2024, and received the highest recognition of the College Medal for the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists in 2022 for her enduring role in research, education and community engagement.

Her research has made internationally important contributions to the management of neuro-ophthalmic diseases and glaucoma.

Here we meet four alumni doing just that.

She has 268 peer-reviewed publications and has raised more than \$21 million in research funding.

She has transformed glaucoma awareness and education in Aotearoa New Zealand through her role as Co-founder and Chair of Glaucoma NZ, which is the country's leading advocacy organisation for glaucoma patients.

Over the past two decades, her research has helped reshape how clinicians understand, monitor and manage neurological disease – particularly brain tumours – through changes that can be detected in the eye.

"In that sense, my research reflects a broader shift in medicine: toward earlier detection, more precise monitoring, and approaches that can be applied widely. It is a shift with particular relevance for improving access and equity in healthcare, both in New Zealand and globally."

KERRY DOHIG

Feeding Dunedin

Otago alumnus Liam Arthur has combined his passion for cooking and travel with helping make a change for good in Ōtepoti Dunedin.

Originally from Timaru, the 26-year-old recent 20Twenties Young Alumni Award winner, has travelled widely in Europe, Australia, the United States, the Middle East and Africa.

He took a gap year after finishing his studies at Timaru Boys' High School.

"I couch-surfed across Iran and Iraq, which seems a bit crazy now. I worked for free for a good restaurant in Australia, just to try and learn what that was like.

"I was really lucky to get a scholarship from the University. So, they gave me quite a lot of freedom just to travel during the summers."

Arthur received five scholarships at Otago, including Academic Entrance and others in Arts, Philosophy, and for travel, and completed his BA in Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) in 2020.

"I really admired Lisa Ellis, she was the PPE Director at that time. I had this connection to Lisa and what she was teaching. In terms of Economics, I really enjoyed the classes of Trent Smith and Ronald Peeters."

Arthur went to Ethiopia after his second year's study to volunteer on a dairy farm and that is where he met his partner in life and

LOCAL IMPACT

business Jackie Barron.

While fundraising in the United States for their Ethiopian projects, Arthur and Barron were making about 300 meals at a time.

"I thought, 'I'm really making quite nice food and it wouldn't be too hard to make good food for people at a reasonable cost.'"

Back in Dunedin, and initially working from a food truck, the Bowling Club was born in 2023, with the name derived from the plan for most people to bring their own bowls to buy kai.

"Packaging is kind of expensive and wasteful. So, we're keen for people to bring their own bowls and save a dollar."

The Bowling Club has built its reputation on affordable meals – meals are generally between \$5 and \$8 and desserts about \$3 – but it is much more than that. It provides a large-scale food support system, distributing hundreds of frozen and hot meals every week to people who can't make it to the now Caversham-based eatery.

Arthur says the best way that people can support the wonderful mahi that goes on in South Dunedin is to drop in for a meal or order one online.

He says he and Barron are trying to consolidate what they have.

"It's been a very hectic four years of trying



to start the Bowling Club and just figure out how to do it properly. It's very simple things like what it means to hire someone and your obligations and how to do taxes and all the sort of boring things with running a business.

"The Bowling Club has become something that supports people a lot and it's quite a big service now. We're probably giving away about 800 meals a week.

"From the very start, we thought we could say to people, well, if you can't afford the food, you can just come up and ask for some, and we'll give it to you, because the food's cheap anyway. And the idea behind that was if you could, if you came into the Bowling Club and you had a bit of spare money, you could pay it forward."

KERRY DOHIG



LIAM ARTHUR: "From the very start, we thought we could say to people, well, if you can't afford the food, you can just come up and ask for some, and we'll give it to you, because the food's cheap anyway."

Singing success

Jumping onto a plane in Brisbane to get to an audition in Berlin has opened the next door in Otago Music alumna and soprano-to-watch Sarah Hubbard's journey to an international singing career.

While studying at the Queensland Conservatorium at Griffith University in 2024, Hubbard travelled to the Hamburg State Opera to audition for its training programme. At the recommendation of her professors, while she was in Germany she had a singing lesson at the Universität der Künste Berlin, with Australian teacher and mezzo-soprano, Professor of Voice Dr Caitlin Hulcup.

"I really liked her as a teacher. For singing, that's really important – it's not just the institution, it's more so the teacher that matters, because you're essentially putting your career in their hands."

While she didn't get into the Hamburg programme, she did like Hulcup and Berlin, and in 2025 applied to do her Master's in Opera at the Universität der Künste, one of the most

prestigious opera training programmes in the world.

After a comprehensive written and video application, Hubbard was invited for a live audition – with just two weeks' notice. "So, I had to quit my job and jump on a plane to Berlin. I had to sing six arias, do a two-minute German monologue and have a whole role I knew I could sing – it was quite an intense audition."

The trip was worth the stress. Hubbard was accepted and, after two months of rigorous German language study (which built on a year of German language at Otago), she passed the fluency exams and began her first semester in October 2025.

Hubbard has been singing since she was 12. At Otago, she enjoyed studying all types of music, and says this gave her both greater musical experience and the chance to meet people other than classical musicians and make some friends from different disciplines. She graduated with a MusB in Performance in 2022.

In the same year, at the age of 21, she was one of five finalists in New Zealand's Lexus Song Quest, which she describes as a pivotal moment.



SARAH HUBBARD: "... if I can do this, I can do anything."

She also made her debut with New Zealand Opera in 2022, in their production of Macbeth, as an Apparition.

After graduating, and with financial help from a FAME Emerging Practitioner Award, Sarah went to the Queensland Conservatorium, where she gained a Postgraduate Certificate in Opera. But Europe was always in her sights.

Six months in, she says the move to Berlin has been a huge change and challenge, with everything apart from the singing being new.

"It's a completely different environment, but it's also super exciting and it's like if I can do this, I can do anything."

Hubbard was named one of Otago's 20Twenties Young Alumni Award winners in 2025.

MARGIE CLARK

Trailblazing leader

A lifetime of service across education, health and community leadership was honoured earlier this year with the presentation of the inaugural University of Otago Distinguished Alumni Award to The Honourable Tapusātele Le Māmea Tuiletufuga Lemalu Su'a Leatuavao Dr Ropati Mualia.

Le Māmea was New Zealand's first Samoan to earn a Bachelor of Pharmacy, graduating from Otago in 1970.

At a special ceremony in Apia, Samoa, Le Māmea was recognised for his crucial roles in the development of Samoa's healthcare, as well as the founding of the National University of Samoa.

Le Māmea says he was deeply honoured and sincerely grateful to learn of the recognition.

"This award holds special significance, not only in reflecting on my academic beginnings at Otago in 1967, but also in my enduring connection to the University and to the Pacific community."

Robertson says Le Māmea's life's work is testament to visionary leadership, integrity, and

a profound commitment to public service, which makes him a most deserving recipient of the award.

"Le Māmea's achievements have laid the foundation for decades of impact across Samoa and the Pacific."

Otago Vice-Chancellor Grant Robertson says Le Māmea has also remained one of the University's most committed advocates.

Six of Le Māmea's seven children are Otago graduates, followed by four of his grandchildren, while a further four grandchildren are current Otago students.

After graduating, Le Māmea began his professional career as Chief Pharmacist at Cherry Farm Hospital, north of Dunedin, in 1971.

He returned home to serve as Chief Pharmacist at the Tupua Tamasese Meaole National Hospital of Samoa from 1972 to 1973, playing a crucial role in the development of Samoa's pharmacy services.

He went on to establish Samoa Pharmacy Limited, one of Samoa's locally owned pharmacy enterprises, and later founded Multipharm Laboratories. Through these ventures, he helped make healthcare more accessible to communities in Apia and beyond.

Le Māmea was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Samoa in 1979 and appointed

to Cabinet in 1982. When he resigned from Parliament in 2016, the Samoan Government appointed him to the Council of Deputies (Deputy Head of State).

Perhaps his most transformative contribution was his role as Samoa's Minister of Education in founding the National University of Samoa (NUS) in 1984.

He also made a significant impact as a community leader through service as a matai, church elder, lay preacher, and across numerous civic, sporting and charitable organisations.

MARGIE CLARK



TAPUSĀTELE LE MĀMEA TUILETUFUGA LEMALU SU'A LEATUAVAO DR ROPATI MUALIA WITH GRANT ROBERTSON: "This award holds special significance ... in my enduring connection to the University and to the Pacific community."



Otago Zoology graduate Veronica Rotman (right) works with WAI volunteer Leni Karavanas to investigate microplastics in Lake Wanaka.

Unique collaboration
for freshwater

Keeping Otago's freshwater ecosystems healthy is at the heart of a new fundraising collaboration supporting student scholarships and research at the University of Otago – Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka and Lincoln University – Te Whare Wānaka O Aoraki.

Led by not-for-profit WAI Wānaka, whose vision is 'healthy ecosystems and community wellbeing for future generations', the initiative will fund summer internships and postgraduate research that directly support community-led freshwater action. Scholarships include internships of eight- to 10-weeks, valued at \$10,000 per student, and \$25,000 to support master's research.

WAI Wānaka works alongside individuals and organisations across the Upper Clutha to reverse biodiversity loss and improve freshwater health. WAI's research team

collaborates with both universities, fostering a multidisciplinary approach to freshwater science that spans geography, geology, social sciences and mātauranga Māori.

During their internships, students will undertake applied research projects designed to accelerate community action for freshwater. The projects provide valuable real-world research experience, helping develop the next generation of environmental researchers.

WAI Wānaka Partnerships Lead Michaela Blacklock says the collaboration marks the first time WAI Wānaka and the two universities have partnered in this way.

"It's a really nice example of the tertiary sector collaborating for the greater good," she says.

"This is about creating the best possible outcomes for students, for WAI's work, and ultimately for the environment."

Community engagement is central to WAI Wānaka's approach.

"We're a small organisation, so a big part

The University is actively developing new projects to accelerate research opportunities across health, the arts, science and business – and is seeking philanthropic people who are passionate about giving back.

of how we work is amplifying impact through people – whether that is boots on the ground or shaping effective messaging to impact systems at a policy and planning level."

WAI Wānaka also feels a responsibility to support students to gain meaningful work experience and to put their learning into practice, while offering insight into how a small charitable organisation operates.

In return, students contribute valuable research capacity to WAI Wānaka, with their projects closely aligned to the organisation's wider work programme.

This innovative partnership relies on philanthropic support to fund student internships and research. Your contribution helps connect academic learning with community action for healthier freshwater ecosystems.

TO DONATE VISIT:



Welcome reprieve for Arts Fellowships but further support vital

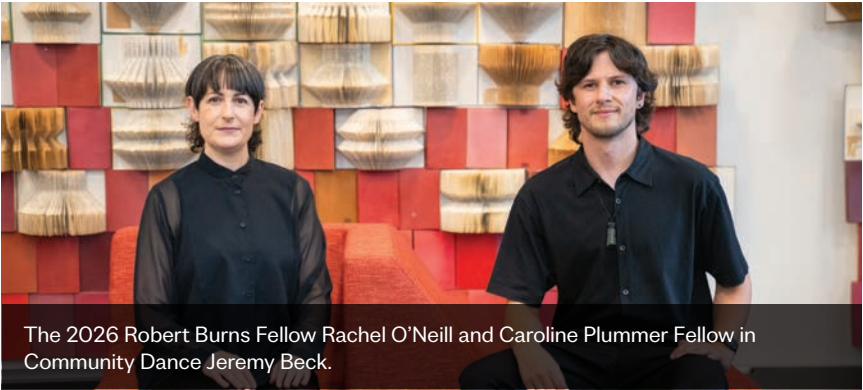
The University of Otago is delighted that support from the community has meant the Frances Hodgkins and Mozart Arts Fellowships will be awarded again next year, after financial pressures saw them paused in 2026.

The Frances Hodgkins Fellowship has received a significant grant from the Russell Henderson Charitable Trust, while a variety of donors have contributed to the Mozart Fellowship.

Vice-Chancellor Grant Robertson says the Fellowships are flagships for the University and he is very pleased they are available again.

"We're incredibly grateful for the financial support we have received which allows us to continue to invest in talented artists from around Aotearoa New Zealand," he says.

However, while the Fellowships will be available next year, there is still a need for



additional philanthropic support to ensure their long-term financial sustainability. Growing the trust funds which support the Fellowships is vital to ensuring they can be offered annually.

"The University is committed to the Fellowships. As was the case when they were first established, it is the generosity of donors and supporters that is critical to success. We will work with the wider community to ensure the Fellowships' long-term sustainability and enable them to continue annually in perpetuity."

The Frances Hodgkins Fellowship is the country's longest-standing and most prestigious full-year residential award for visual

artists (see more on page 42 - 43), while the Mozart Fellowship was established to aid and encourage music composers in the practise and advancement of their art.

These Fellowships hold a special place in the creative heart of New Zealand, and with support they will continue to do so long into the future.

TO DONATE VISIT:

Frances Hodgkins Fellowship Fund

The Mozart Fellowship



Leading diabetes and obesity research

In March 2026, the Government announced its first National Diabetes Roadmap, which sets the direction for improving diabetes prevention, care and outcomes. This is against a background of Health New Zealand, Te Whatu Ora spending \$2.1 billion on diabetes treatment in the 2025 financial year.

The University of Otago's Edgar Diabetes and Obesity Research Centre (EDOR) played an important role in shaping the roadmap, drawing on two decades of practical, cost-effective and community tested research.

Since 2003, EDOR has united world-class science and clinical expertise, transforming the prevention and treatment of diabetes and obesity in Aotearoa New Zealand and around the globe.

EDOR began as the Edgar National Centre for Diabetes Research, supported by the

generosity of the late Sir Eion Edgar and Lady Jan Edgar, with Professor Jim Mann appointed the inaugural Director.

Sir Eion's son, Hamish Edgar, says his family's early support of EDOR reflects "our belief in the value of research addressing a growing health challenge.

"Since then, the programme has generated important insights with relevance in New Zealand and beyond."

The Centre's achievements include numerous studies revealing the key role of diet, exercise and sleep in the prevention and management of diabetes and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

EDOR's research on the protective effects of dietary fibre has underpinned World Health Organization nutritional recommendations



aimed at reducing the global risk of NCDs (see pages 19 - 21) and informed international guidelines for the treatment of diabetes – empowering doctors, practitioners and governments to improve lives worldwide.

To continue working at pace, EDOR is seeking partners of support for its next two decades of research.

TO DONATE VISIT:



Alumni events around New Zealand and the world

It has been our pleasure and privilege to host our alumni at events and reunions around Aotearoa New Zealand and the world, and to hear about their lives and journeys since graduation. Here are just a few of the highlights.



Kuala Lumpur Alumni Event

August, 2025 | Otago alumni connecting at our event in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



Oxford Young Scholars Lunch

September, 2025 | Oxford young alumni lunch, where young scholars from Otago now studying at Oxford met with Vice-Chancellor, Grant Robertson, to present and discuss their research.



Shanghai Alumni Event

November, 2025 | Alumni and friends giving the thumbs up at our Shanghai event last year.



Sydney Alumni Event

February, 2026 | Alumni celebrating at our event in Sydney.

Yes, I would like to support the University of Otago and its ongoing programmes. Your gift can be directed to any one of the following areas:

- ☐ Scholarships
☐ Research
☐ Pūtea Tautoko Student Hardship Fund
☐ Where the need is greatest
☐ Other

Amount of gift

☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$500 ☐ \$1000

or my choice is

Payment options

1. Make a one-off donation or set up a monthly donation using our secure giving page at otago.ac.nz/alumni/donate

2. Charge my credit card: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

Card number:

Expiry date:

Cardholder's name:

Signature:

3. Direct deposit:

Bank Name: ANZ Bank New Zealand Limited
Account Name: University of Otago Foundation Trust
Account Number: 01-1839-0944132-00
Swift (if required): ANZBNZ22
Particulars: eg: Smith JA
Reference/code: e.g. Greatest Need or Scholarship

Leaving a bequest

- ☐ I would like information about including a gift to the University of Otago in my will.
☐ I have already included a gift to the University of Otago in my will and would like to notify the Bequest Manager.

For residents in the UK:
please visit peoplesfundraising.com/donation/otagouniversitytrust-UK
or email Chapel & York at otago@chapel-york.com

For residents in the USA who wish to make a tax deductible donation: please visit otagoalumni.us/support
or email treasurer@otagoalumni.us

For residents in New Zealand and rest of the world, please send this form and your donation to:
Development and Alumni Relations Office
University of Otago
PO Box 56
Dunedin 9054
New Zealand

Name:

Address:

Email:

Thank you for your support

Ōtepoti campus glow up

Otago's Dunedin campus is often listed among the world's most beautiful – and in full autumn glory it is surely hard to beat.

Photo: Dave Bull

It is no secret that Otago's Ōtepoti Dunedin campus has long been one of the world's most beautiful, and a series of small but significant added touches during the past year mean it is only getting better.

FROM THE ADDITION OF NEW AMENITY AND RECREATION SPACES TO THE FORMAL RECOGNITION of pieces of architectural and social history, the University of Otago campus is a jewel in the crown of Dunedin's academic and cultural landscape.

It recently made a list of the world's most stunning campuses – coming in 27th in the AOL ranking – the only Aotearoa New Zealand campus to make the list. AOL

praised the green spaces and the lovely Ōwheo, Water of Leith, and improvements have continued.

In April 2025, a shared garden space was opened on the corner of Clyde and Union Street East. The garden has been designed to support wellbeing on campus by providing a place for meeting, eating and relaxing between classes.

Located in a busy foot-traffic area connecting key areas of campus, the space features bench seating and a large lawn area surrounded by native plantings.

The Acting Director of Property and Campus Development, Gordon Roy, says the garden's landscaping was informed by the pre-colonial ecology of the area (alluvial and swamp forest/coastal broadleaf forest), and the design acknowledges the footprint left behind by the original University-owned villas.

Another popular enhancement has been the opening of a multi-purpose turf area on the Union Lawn, providing another outdoor space to relax – actively or passively.

The upgraded area includes a new artificial turf equipped with a basketball hoop, netball hoop, pickleball net and volleyball net, an outdoor table tennis table and new picnic tables.

Roy says the opening of this area complements the nearby Union upgrade project, which included a new conservatory and outdoor eating area at Auahi Ora.

"We wanted to create a space where students could come together – whether that's for a quick game between classes or an inviting area to eat, study or catch up in the fresh air," Roy says.

"The whole area is designed to be inclusive, accessible and really versatile."

Meanwhile, a forgotten wartime shelter on campus has been recognised as a historic treasure.

The air raid shelter, hidden just below street level at the southeast corner of the Geology building, is considered one of the best-preserved examples of its kind in Aotearoa New Zealand, according to

Otago Military Group representative Peter Trevathan.

Long referred to by staff and students as the 'bomb shelter', they had always suspected the basement, previously used for storing fossils, whale skeletons and the like, had a deeper history. But it wasn't until Trevathan investigated the site in 2024 that they knew for sure.

Built at the beginning of World War 2, the shelter was one of a handful of government shelters located on campus and one of hundreds across the country.

It is estimated that fewer than 2 per cent of the original bunkers are still intact and accessible today, making the Geology building shelter a particularly rare wartime relic.

New interpretative signage recognising the authenticity and historic value of the shelter was formally unveiled in May 2026.

Another piece of history came to life late last year with the re-opening of the refurbished Consumer and Applied Sciences



Photo: Alan Dove

ABOVE: The latest addition to campus – a shared garden space was opened on the corner of Clyde and Union Street East. **BELOW LEFT:** The recently refurbished and re-named Annie Stevenson Building, now home to much of the University's Senior Leadership Team. **BELOW RIGHT:** Renovations and additions have made the Union area a great place for a catch up.



Photo: Dave Bull

(CApSc) Building.

The building has undergone significant renovation and seismic strengthening. It is now a modern, open-plan space and has been occupied by staff relocated from the Clocktower, including Senior Leadership Team members, since October 2025. It has also been renamed the Annie Stevenson Building, after one of the first two graduates of the Home Science School and a most generous benefactor of the University.

Looking ahead, work and engagement is underway on a refreshed Campus Master Plan – the long-term framework which guides how the University's places, spaces and physical environments support learning, research, people and community.

Roy says Otago's current Master Plan, adopted in 2010, shaped campus developments across the University for more than a decade.

While many of its ambitions have been achieved, the time is right for a new plan that reflects a very different operating

environment, he says.

"Much has changed since 2010 – we have experienced a global pandemic, increased competition, changing teaching pedagogy and, like universities around the world, significant financial challenges.

"The Master Plan will take a strategic and responsive approach to campus planning, setting an aspirational vision for the future but grounded in the reality of affordability and sustainability."

The updated Master Plan will also better reflect and support the University's *Vision 2040* and *Pae Tata* strategic plans, as well as its commitment to becoming a Te Tiriti-led institution.

"It's about continuing to evolve the campus in a way that is thoughtful and responsive, creating spaces that support how people can learn, connect and spend time here."

JAMIE SHAW

Help us stay connected with you



- Our alumni communications and information about events – including invitations – are sent by email. To update your email address and/or details please contact us via:
[Email database.alumni@otago.ac.nz](mailto:database.alumni@otago.ac.nz)
[Visit alumni.otago.ac.nz/alumni-update-form](http://alumni.otago.ac.nz/alumni-update-form)
[Or phone +64 3 479 4516](tel:+6434794516)
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