

# He Kete Kōrero



WELLINGTON

University of Otago, Wellington Newsletter | Summer 2019-2020

## Sunny's farewell

Tēnā koutou katoa

Welcome to the Summer 2019-2020 edition of *He Kete Kōrero*.

This will be my last *He Kete Kōrero* to you now that I am preparing to leave after almost nine years.

I am incredibly proud of all we have achieved together. The success of the Wellington school across all our domains of learning, teaching and research, and in Te Ao Māori, Pasifika and in diversity, inclusion and participation, are a testament to everyone here.

As many of you know I am moving into a new role as Chief Executive of the Health Research Council of New Zealand where I will be continuing to advocate for research that will help improve the health of all New Zealanders and reduce long-standing inequalities in health.

This past year we have shared many special occasions, including the commissioning of our Māori cloak, a kākahu named *Te Iti Kahurangi (The Most Treasured)*, and the opening of our Pacific Office, which acknowledges the strong and growing Pacific presence on campus.

I am hugely grateful to have had the opportunity to lead the school, and would like to thank you all for your support and loyalty.

Associate Professor William Levack, who has been promoted to Professor from February 2020, will be taking over the role as Dean and Head of Campus on January 15 and I know that you will give him a warm welcome as he takes up the baton.

Ngā mihi nui

Sunny Collings  
Dean and  
Head of Campus



## New Dean for Wellington

**Associate Professor William Levack** from the Department of Medicine has been appointed as Dean and Head of the Wellington Campus.

Associate Professor Levack has worked at the University of Otago, Wellington, for 18 years, and is currently Associate Dean of Research and the Academic Head of the Rehabilitation Teaching and Research Unit (RTRU).

Prior to coming to the University, he worked as a physiotherapist in the public and private sector, specialising in rehabilitation for complex brain injury, and served for some years as a manager at the Capital and Coast District Health Board.

He is on the Executive Committee of Cochrane Rehabilitation, an international group of researchers who strive to improve evidence-based practice in rehabilitation, a group he helped establish in 2016.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Division of Health Sciences, **Professor Paul Brunton**, said he was delighted that Associate Professor Levack would now be in a position to provide his leadership to the Wellington campus.

Associate Professor Levack says he was motivated to apply for the role by the encouragement of other staff.

“Having worked full-time here since 2003, I am passionate about the work we do, proud of our accomplishments and very keen to contribute further to the growth of teaching and research excellence here over the next five to 10 years.

“My success in this role will be hugely dependent on the support of our excellent staff.”

He believes one of the school's strengths is its location in the capital city.

“I think the Wellington campus can play a key role in connecting the University to government, and by extension, to the rest of the country.

Associate Professor Levack will step down from his roles as Associate Dean of Research and Academic Head of the RTRU when he takes up his new position on 15 January. He has been promoted to Professor from 1 February.



## Building equity into AI

A Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Public Health, **Dr Nhung Nghiem**, has been awarded a \$300,000 Fast-Start research grant from the Marsden Fund to work on a leading edge project to build equity into artificial intelligence models.

Dr Nghiem says her research aims to use New Zealand's rich social and health datasets to build equity into machine learning models used to predict cardiovascular disease risk and healthcare costs among people with diabetes.

The study is likely to be the first in the world to use cultural knowledge to inform fairness in artificial intelligence algorithms in diabetes and cardiovascular health.

"In Aotearoa New Zealand diabetes and cardiovascular diseases are the leading causes of premature death and disease burden, and are a major source of health inequities for Māori, Pacific and Asian populations. Many of these deaths could potentially be prevented, and the results of the study could therefore assist in designing prevention programmes that are suitable for particular populations," she says.

Fellow Wellington researcher **Dr Max Berry**, from the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, is co-principal investigator on a \$960,000 Marsden-funded research project which will investigate the effects of low maternal vitamin C status during pregnancy on prenatal development. Dr Berry will work on the project with **Professor Margreet Vissers**, a Principal Investigator at the Centre for Free Radical Research at the University of Otago in Christchurch and UOW Research Fellow, **Dr Rebecca Dyson**.



Dr Nhung Nghiem.

## WHS Student wins Otago prize at Science Fair

It was a mathematical model predicting the time it would take for different materials to reach their combustion temperatures which won Year 11 Wellington High School student Ryan Bright (16) the University of Otago prize in this year's NIWA Wellington Regional Science and Technology Fair.

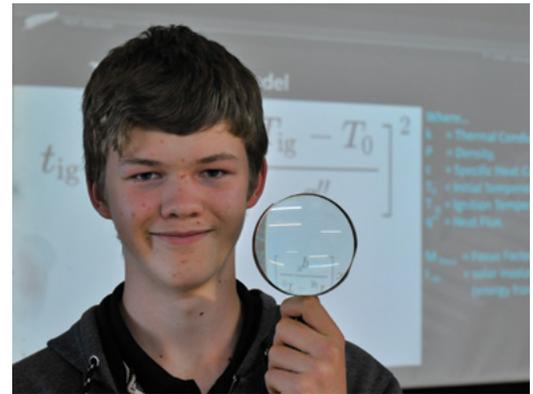
Ryan based his winning entry on a research project he developed when he competed as part of the six-student New Zealand team which won gold at the International Young Naturalists Tournament in Belarus in August.

"One of the three problems I worked on as part of the team was starting a fire with a magnifying glass. So after the tournament, I developed this into a science fair project."

Ryan compared the predictions from his mathematical model to other data he gathered and made it more accurate by adding more terms to take into account other factors, such as the 'albedo' or reflectivity of the material.

"I also did a test with a thermal camera and made a graph of temperature over time so I could see how a material heats up using a lens."

Ryan was presented with the University of Otago prize pack by Associate Dean of Research, **Associate Professor William Levack**, at the awards ceremony in August.



Ryan Bright.

## Pacific Workshop

A pre-conference workshop focussed on research activities in the Pacific region was held on campus in November ahead of the Otago Global Health Institute's annual conference.

The workshop focused on the cultural, practical and methodological issues of research in Pacific settings and was facilitated by **Dr Viliami Puloka**, a Research Fellow in the Department of Public Health and Senior Health Promotion Strategist at the Health Promotion Forum of New Zealand.

Featured speakers included Dr Puloka; **Dr Dianne Sika-Paotonu**, the Associate Dean (Pacific) at the University of Otago, Wellington; Ms Avelina Rokoduru, the Co-ordinator of the Pacific Sexual and Reproductive Health Research Centre at Fiji National University; and **Dr Patrick Vakaoti**, Associate Dean (Pacific) Humanities at the University of Otago.

Presentations were also made by **Professor John Crump**, Co-Director, Otago Global Health Institute; **Professor Philip Hill**, McAuley Professor of International Health; and **Dr Rita Przybilski**, Environment and Energy Sector Business Development Manager at the University of Otago.



(left to right): Dr Patrick Vakaoti, Dr Dianne Sika-Paotonu, Dr Adriu Naduva, Ms Avelina Rokoduru and Ms Lupeoletalalelei Isaia.

## Boost for Māori and Pacific research

Māori and Pacific research on the Wellington campus has received a funding boost, with Health Research Council grants for research in fields ranging from breastfeeding support for whānau Māori to the design of a sleep 'toolkit' for Pacific children and their families.

Māori Health Research Development grants have been awarded to **Carmen Timu-Parata** to look at breastfeeding support for whānau Māori and to **Denver Ruwhiu** to explore conflicts of professionalism in medical curricula with Māori tikanga and values.

A Pacific Health Research PhD Scholarship has been awarded to **Albany Lucas** to design potential sleep toolkit components that incorporate Pacific values; and a Pacific Health Research Masters Scholarship has been awarded to **Tutangi Amataiti** to look at improving adherence to a reduced carbohydrate diet for women with gestational diabetes. Ms Amataiti has also received a grant from the Wellington Medical Research Foundation, Research for Life.

## Sesquicentennial Distinguished Chair

**Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman** from the Department of Public Health has been chosen as one of seven inaugural University of Otago Sesquicentennial Distinguished Chairs (Poutoko Taiea).

Professor Howden-Chapman was selected for the prestigious new role because of the impact her research on healthy housing and sustainable cities has had on society and the environment.

Vice-Chancellor **Professor Harlene Hayne** says those chosen are outstanding citizens, with a strong record of leadership and service in the University, who are pre-eminent in their fields.

“These scholars are carrying out research at the highest level which has a positive impact on the understanding, development, and well-being of individuals, society and the environment.”

Professor Howden-Chapman says the goal of her four-year term will be to further raise awareness of the work of the University and the two research programmes she chairs.

“I foresee many opportunities to showcase the work of the He Kāinga Oranga/Housing and Health Research Programme and the New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Cities.”

Professor Howden-Chapman has also recently been appointed as one of five new board members to oversee the new crown agency Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities.



Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman.

## Commendation for international PhD student

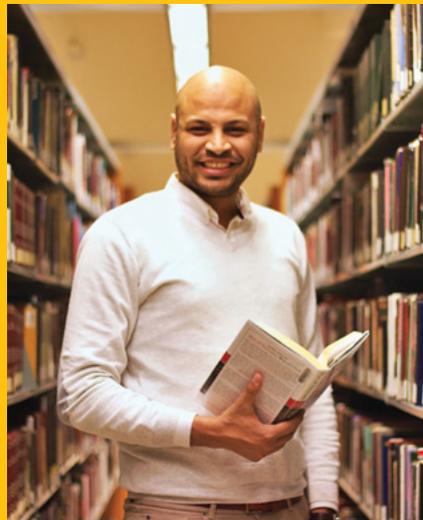
International PhD student **Sherif Ammar** from Egypt has been highly commended for academic excellence in the Wellington International Student Excellence Awards.

The *WellingtonNZ*-organised awards acknowledge international students for their work in community engagement, leadership, academia and creative pursuits.

Mr Ammar, who has a University of Otago Doctoral Scholarship, was nominated for the award by his PhD supervisor, **Professor Michael Baker**, who described him as an exceptional student.

Mr Ammar, who is a Research Fellow in the Department of Public Health, is investigating the risks to New Zealand from mosquito-borne viral diseases, including dengue fever and the Zika, chikungunya and Ross River viruses under current and projected climatic conditions. His study will also provide a basis for the development of an early warning system for use by public health agencies.

Mr Ammar has an MSc in Medical Entomology from Ain Shams University, Egypt.



Sherif Ammar.

## Two in a row for Woman of the Year Award



Professor Diana Sarfati.

**Professor Diana Sarfati** from the Department of Public Health at the University of Otago, Wellington has been named *NEXT* magazine's Woman of the Year for 2019.

Her award makes it two in a row for the Wellington school's Department of Public Health, with **Professor Philippa Howden-Chapman** named as *NEXT*'s Woman of the Year in 2018.

Professor Sarfati was selected for her ground-breaking work in cancer treatment and control, particularly for championing the needs of Māori and Pacific peoples.

She is currently on leave from her role as Head of the Department of Public Health and Director of the Cancer and Chronic Conditions research group, after taking up the role of interim Chief Executive of the Cancer Control Agency.

**Dr Max Berry**, a senior lecturer in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, and a neonatologist at the Wellington Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, was a finalist in the health and science category of the awards.

## 'Welly' award for Professor Brett Delahunt

Pathologist **Professor Brett Delahunt** has won the Science and Technology category in the 2019 Dominion Post Wellingtonian of the Year Awards.

Professor Delahunt from the Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine was recognised for his work on prostate and renal cancer. His research has changed the way these cancers are treated worldwide, benefiting hundreds of thousands of patients a year.

Professor Delahunt has worked at the Pathology Department for almost 40 years, and has more than 500 academic publications to his name.

Professor Brett Delahunt with trainee pathologist Dr Micaela Yee.



## Academic Promotions



William Levack



Jean Hay-Smith



Esko Wiltshire

Three academic staff from the University of Otago, Wellington have been promoted to the position of Professor.

The new professors are: **William Levack**, who takes up the role of Dean and Head of Campus on 15 January; **Jean Hay-Smith**, from the Rehabilitation Teaching and Research Unit in the Department of Medicine, whose research focuses on improving the well-being of people with bladder problems and pelvic organ prolapse; and **Esko Wiltshire** from the

Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, who has research and clinical expertise involving young people with chronic endocrine conditions, particularly type 1 diabetes.

The promotions were announced by Vice-Chancellor **Professor Harlene Hayne**, who said they recognised the hard work, skill and dedication of the academics.

“The depth and breadth of research expertise, leadership and commitment to

their work demonstrated by these staff is highlighted with their promotion.”

A further two academics were promoted to the position of Associate Professor: **Max Berry**, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health and Director of the Centre for Translational Physiology, and **Sinead Donnelly**, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Medicine.

The promotions take effect from 1 February 2020.

## Newtown School brings Pacific flavour to campus

A little bit of the Pacific came to the University campus in November when students from Newtown School brought themed art works to decorate the walls for the 2019 Otago Global Health Institute annual conference.

The conference, which was held in Wellington for the first time this year, had a focus on Pacific research and global health in the era of climate change.

The students were presented with floral leis by visiting keynote speaker, Dr Colin Tukuitonga, the Director-General of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, and given colouring books published to celebrate the University's 150th year.



Newtown School Principal Mark Brown with the students and their art work.



## Public Health Summer School 2020

With 32 short courses on offer, February's Public Health Summer School offers the chance to learn more about a wide range of topics ranging from Māori suicide prevention to the future of firearms control in New Zealand.

The 2020 programme has 14 new topics, including countering implicit bias and racism in health care, disaster management and public health, responding to a mystery epidemic in the Pacific, and the connections between the alcohol, gambling, junk food and tobacco industries.

The event offers not just an opportunity for professional development and inspiration, but also a chance to connect with others who have different perspectives.

Courses range from one to two days and are designed to be easy to fit around work commitments.

The summer school runs from 10 to 28 February. Early bird rates are available until 19 December, with a further 50 per cent reduction on course fees for staff and students.

For more information, visit:

[otago.ac.nz/uowsummerschool](https://otago.ac.nz/uowsummerschool)

For more news, visit our news page  
[otago.ac.nz/wellington/news](https://otago.ac.nz/wellington/news)

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