



University  
of Otago  
ŌTAKOU WHAKAIHU WAKA

Pōneke  
Wellington  
Campus

# He Kete Kōrero

University of Otago, Wellington Newsletter | Winter 2024

## Pānui from the Dean

Tēnā koutou katoa,

Welcome to the July 2024 issue of *He Kete Kōrero*.

This year, Matariki marked not only the start of a new year in the Māori calendar, but a new beginning for the Wellington campus.

Many of our ongoing building projects are now complete and staff and students are together in our spaces in Newtown for the first time since August 2021. It's been lovely seeing familiar faces and interactions between students and staff on campus each day and I'm looking forward to a great rest of the year.

The Wellington launch of the University's new tohu and reo Māori name Ōtakou Whakaihu Waka in May was a hugely successful and uplifting event, with participation from the Mayor, Tory Whanau, mana whenua, the Pacific community and staff and students. It was a great way to reconnect with community partners and bring the warmth of our community back into the Nordmeyer Lecture Theatre.

I enjoyed hosting visits from the new Vice-Chancellor Grant Robertson in April, ahead of his formal welcome to the role on 1 July, and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Health Sciences, Associate Professor Megan Gibbons (Ngāpuhi) in May. They both have a good understanding of the importance of the Wellington campus and I am very much looking forward to working with them.

My warmest congratulations to all those who have been successful in recent grant funding rounds. It is wonderful to see our researchers continuing to excel in such a highly competitive environment.

I hope you have all managed some time to gather with those close to you this Matariki as we acknowledge those who have passed and look ahead to the rest of the year.

Ngā mihi nui

PROFESSOR  
WILLIAM LEVACK  
Manutaki | Dean and  
Head of Campus



## Celebrating our new brand

Staff, students and alumni gathered at the Newtown campus on 1 May to celebrate the launch of the University's new reo Māori name Ōtakou Whakaihu Waka and tohu (symbol), with support from mana whenua partners Ngāti Toa Rangatira and Te Atiawa.

**Wellington Mayor Tory Whanau** took centre stage for the event, untying a blue ribbon to begin the unveiling in a ceremony filled with waiata and music and dance from the Pacific.

The event was one of three ceremonies held to unveil new signage on the three Otago campuses, a visible marker on the University's path to become Te Tiriti-led.

Dean and Head of Campus **Professor William Levack** told those gathered that he was personally inspired by the new ingoa, a metaphor which means 'A Place of Many Firsts'.

"I think everyone who has ever worked or studied at our University can relate to this. Many of our graduates are the first in their families to go to university or the first to graduate as a health professional or as a biomedical researcher."

**Toa Waaka** (Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Te Atiawa, Ngāti Mutunga), the campus's Rautaki Hononga Māori – Māori Strategic Framework Project Manager, spoke about the achievements of Aotearoa's first Māori doctors. Connections with the Pacific were the focus of talks from the Associate Dean (Pacific) for the Division of Health Sciences, **Associate Professor Dianne Sika-Paotonu**, and the late **Dr Ruth Toumu'a**, formerly Associate Dean (Pacific) on the Wellington campus, whose support and guidance was invaluable to the organisation of the event.

Three speakers shared personal stories on the theme of 'firsts': **Emeritus Professor Dawn Elder**; final-year medical student and president of Ngā Puna Hauora, **Hotene Ngaropo-Tuia** (Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi); and community research partner, **Cheryl Davies**, from the Tu Kotahi Māori Asthma and Research Trust and Kōkiri Marae.

Those at the event were entertained by performances from students from the kapa haka rōpū at Te Kura Māori o Porirua and with traditional tau'olunga dance, and music from the Wellington Tongan community.

Watch the video on our University of Otago, Wellington, [YouTube page](#).

Mayor Tory Whanau after the unveiling.



## Enquiring minds

It was a summer filled with learning for the 34 Otago students who came together on the Wellington campus to take part in this year's Summer Studentship research programme.

The students worked on a wide variety of projects, ranging from looking at the impact of narcolepsy on quality of life to investigating the use of AI Chatbots for mental health therapy.

**Associate Professor Sara Filoche** says the 10-week programme is one of the highlights in the school calendar, giving students the opportunity to learn to do research under the supervision of academic staff.

The programme finished with a poster showcase in January, where 20 of the students presented their work to judges **Dr Aaron Stevens**, **Dr Claire Henry** and **Dr Clint Gray**.



Co-winner of this year's poster competition  
Ainsleyana Puleiata.

The overall winners were **Ainsleyana Puleiata** (supervised by **Associate Professor Dianne Sika-Paotonu**), for her poster, 'Sore throats, skin infections and broken hearts' and **Lily Cooper** (supervised by **Dr Henry**), for her poster, 'Exploring the therapeutic potential of medicinal cannabis in endometriosis management'. The work of **Kfyr-Eyal Behar** (supervised by **Dr Tony Lin**) and **Islay Mowat** (supervised by **Dr Carolyn Clark**) was highly commended.

Associate Professor Filoche acknowledged the generous funding from the 15 external sponsors, without which the programme would not be possible. "Some were able to attend the poster showcase and said they thoroughly enjoyed meeting the students and hearing about the research their funding had supported."

## Āwhina Scholarship

A fifth-year medical student on the Wellington campus, **Chloe Priebe** (Ngāpuhi, Te Arawa), was announced as the inaugural recipient of the Āwhina Scholarship at the end of last year.

The \$5,000 scholarship has been set up to provide financial support to one female Māori or Pacific medical student each year. It was established with a donation from a general practitioner, who wanted to give back to the medical school and to support and encourage students in their careers.

Chloe has been involved in kaupapa to help Māori taira throughout her time at med school, including mentoring first-year health science students, and being part of the Ka Rikarika o Tāne student mentorship programme. She has served on the executive of Ngā Puna Hauora, the Māori health professional student organisation since 2022 and is on the executive of Te Oranga (the Māori Medical Students' Association).

She says it is an honour to be the first wahine to receive the scholarship.



## Three Minute Thesis

Seven postgraduate students competed to be the best at communicating their research in short, sharp fashion at the Wellington campus heats of the Three Minute Thesis competition on 26 June.

The winner was PhD student **Ellie Johnson** from the Department of Public Health (supervised by **Professor Nevil Piers** and **Dr Elinor Chisholm**), who spoke about her thesis topic 'What is Home?' Ellie was awarded a certificate and a prize of \$500 donated by event sponsor Research for Life.

The event was judged by **Dr Nick Baker** from the University's Graduate Research School in Dunedin, **Darryl Carpenter**, the CEO of the Cancer Society's Wellington Division and **Dr Kimberley O'Sullivan** from the Department of Public Health.

The Otago Grand Final will be held in Dunedin on 15 August.

## Research funding

Researchers on the Wellington campus have been awarded significant external funding for studies across a wide range of areas from reducing stroke inequities for rural Māori, to enhancing the health and wellbeing of rangatahi experiencing early psychosis.

**Health Research Council grants:**

**Associate Professor Andrew Waa** and **Lani Teddy** from the Department of Public Health have been awarded a \$1.2 million project grant to explore rangatahi Māori experiences and perceptions of smoking and vaping.

**Professor Anna Ranta** from the Department of Medicine has been awarded a \$1.4m project grant to work on a study aimed at reducing stroke inequities for rural Māori.

**Dr Judy Ormandy** from the Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health has won a \$1.4m project grant to work on cervical cancer prevention in community services.

**Dr Matt Jenkins** from the Department of Psychological Medicine has been awarded a \$400,000 Emerging Researcher grant for his project to enhance the health and wellbeing of rangatahi experiencing early psychosis.

**Associate Professor Sara Filoche** from the Department of Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Women's Health has been awarded a \$150,000 Explorer grant to look at culture-centred design of hospital waiting rooms.

**Dr Christine Barthow** from the Department of Medicine has been awarded a \$146,000 Health Delivery Research Career Development Award for her project studying service provision in a low-cost general practice.

**Dr Carolyn Clark** from the Department of Medicine has been awarded a \$30,000 Health Delivery Research Activation grant to investigate the development of wellbeing coaching programmes in medical school.

**Rutherford Discovery Fellowship:**

**Dr Kimberley O'Sullivan** from the Department of Public Health has been awarded an \$800,000 Rutherford Discovery Fellowship to investigate the mental health impacts of housing and energy use.

**Marsden Fund:**

**Dr Andrea Teng** from the Department of Public Health has been awarded a \$650,000 grant to investigate the effects of Tonga's world-leading, comprehensive taxation on unhealthy foods.

**Dr Elinor Chisholm** from the Department of Public Health has been awarded a \$360,000 Fast Start grant to study employer-provided housing and advance our understanding of how we value 'home'.

**New Zealand Lottery Grants Board:**

Lottery grants have been awarded to **Dr Chloe Campbell**, from the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice for improving medicines safety for older New Zealanders on multiple medicines at hospital discharge; **Dr Matt Jenkins** for his moving with psychosis programme for rangatahi, and **Dr Christine Barthow** for Pacific aiga and general practice perspectives on intergenerational diabetes.



Dr Baker, Lucy Picard, Thalia Heiwari, Ellie Johnson, Darryl Carpenter, Parina Yamjal, Dr O'Sullivan, Kate McDonald, Paul Owaci and Danielle Sword.

## New Kaikōkiri role

**Chen Wang** has been appointed as one of six Kaikōkiri for the University's new Kōkiri Ki Tua educational network for learning and teaching.



The network was set up this year by the Dean of Learning and Teaching, **Professor Tim Cooper**, to connect kaimahi and empower them to share their innovations, ideas, values, practices and teaching tools.

Kōkiri Ki Tua will connect kaimahi across the campuses and divisions, so all staff will have visibility of home-grown innovations in learning and teaching. The Kaikōkiri (those who gather people together to ensure they move forward) will be a part of the Committee for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT) and help oversee teaching.

Chen joined Otago in 2021 as a Senior Professional Practice Fellow in eLearning based in the Education Unit.

She says her role as a Kaikōkiri aligns with her passion for creating connections and fostering collaborative learning environments.

"I firmly believe Kōkiri Ki Tua will have a significant impact by uniting academic and professional staff across Otago and by promoting a collective commitment to learning success."

She aims to be a driving force in promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and disseminating effective practices in teaching and learning and is looking forward to bringing her expertise in learning technology and learning analytics to the network.

"I see myself actively contributing to Kōkiri Ki Tua's mission by identifying and championing projects aimed at enhancing learning and teaching practices. My goal is to elevate the overall educational experience for both staff and students."

## New Year Honours

**Associate Professor Tristram Ingham** (Ngāti Kahungunu ki Heretaunga, Ngāti Porou), was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the New Year Honours list.



Associate Professor Ingham with the Governor-General Rt Hon Dame Cindy Kiro.  
Photo: Government House.

He was honoured for services to the disability community and for his work with the Ministry of Health in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, when he created the concept of a bubble to explain the need for physical distancing.

His honours' citation details his long standing work for the disability community, including his contributions to the founding of the Ministry of Disabled People, Whaikaha.

He has been a member of the Disabled Persons Organisations' Coalition since 2018 and chairs Te Ao Mārama Aotearoa Trust, which represents the interests of tāngata whaikaha Māori (Māori with lived experience of disability) and their whānau.

Internationally, he represents New Zealand on the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

He says the honour shows the Crown recognising the efforts of community partners working as partners to achieve the outcomes everyone wants.

"To me, that is the greatest element of satisfaction."

**Ewen Coleman**, who worked on the Wellington campus for more than 40 years until his retirement in 2017, was awarded the Queen's Service Medal for services to theatre. The honour recognises his work as a director and producer over more than four decades.

## Emerging Rural Educator Award



**Sue Donaldson**, the leader of Te Tai o Poutini Interprofessional Education programme based in Greymouth, has won the Hauora Taiwhenua Rural Health Network's Emerging Rural Educator award.

The network said her dedication to advancing education in rural communities was paving the way for future generations of health professionals, cultivating an environment where interdisciplinary collaboration thrived.

The West Coast Interprofessional Education Programme was set up by the University of Otago in 2021 and is funded by Health NZ Te Whatu Ora. It brings together students from diverse backgrounds, including medicine, nursing, and many other health professions, to create a learning environment that mirrors real-world healthcare settings.

The Hauora Taiwhenua Rural Health Network said one of the achievements of the programme was its emphasis on practical experience through impactful placements and community projects.

"By immersing students in rural healthcare settings, they gain invaluable hands-on experience and develop a deep understanding of the intricacies of providing healthcare in remote areas."

The award was announced at the National Rural Health Conference at Takina, the Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre, on 5 April.

## Liley Medal

**Professor Michael Baker** from the Department of Public Health and his team have been awarded the Health Research Council's Liley Medal for their outstanding contribution to health and medical services.

The medal is awarded annually to an individual or research team whose recent research produced a significant breakthrough within the health and medical fields.

The team published two papers highlighting a major development in understanding the causes of acute rheumatic fever and the role of preceding Group A Streptococcal infections.

Professor Baker was thrilled the team was acknowledged for the quality and impact of the research.

"The studies were challenging to carry out. They required a massive effort by a large group of researchers and clinicians who worked with communities for more than a decade to plan them, do the field work, and then write up and publish the findings."

Their research identified potential new ways to prevent rheumatic fever, such as focusing on effective treatment of skin infections and encouraging children to drink healthy alternatives to sugar-sweetened drinks.

New Zealand is one of the only high income countries to still see new cases of rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease.

It is the second time Professor Baker has won the Liley Medal. He first won the award in 2013 for his study identifying the rise in serious infectious diseases in New Zealand and increasing ethnic inequities, published in *The Lancet*.



The researchers were presented with the award at the Royal Society Te Apārangi Research Honours ceremony at Government House on 23 November.



James Stanley



Lynn McBain



Ricci Harris



Sinéad Donnelly

## Academic promotions

Four academic staff on the Wellington campus have been promoted to the role of Professor from February this year.

The new professors are: **Sinéad Donnelly**, from the Department of Medicine, who is a palliative and general medicine physician and convenor of the palliative medicine module at Otago; **Lynn McBain**, a specialist general practitioner, who is Head of the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice and Deputy Dean of the Wellington campus; **Ricci Harris** (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Raukawa), a public health physician and Kaupapa Māori epidemiologist from the Department of Public Health; and **James Stanley**, a biostatistician and researcher in the Dean's Department whose research is underpinned by a commitment to improving equity and health outcomes for individuals and communities.

The promotions were announced by Acting Vice-Chancellor **Professor Helen Nicholson** at the end of last year. She paid tribute to the academics' unwavering commitment to excellence in research, teaching and service.

"The elevation to the rank of Professor is a significant milestone in one's academic journey, reflecting not only individual achievement but also the positive impact they have had on our academic community."

**Lesley Gray** from the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice, and **Melissa McLeod** (Ngāi Tahu) from the Department of Public Health were promoted to Associate Professor. **Gabrielle Jenkin** from the Department of Psychological Medicine and **Paula Thérèse Toko King** (Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua, Waikato Tainui, Ngāti Maniapoto) from the Department of Public Health were promoted to Research Associate Professor.

Watch the recordings of the Inaugural Professorial Lectures (IPLs) of **Professor McBain** and **Professor Stanley** on our University of Otago, Wellington, YouTube channel. **Professor Donnelly's** IPL will be held on 11 September.

## Farewells

The Wellington campus bid farewell to long-serving staff members **Maxine Schutte**, Collections and Lending Services Librarian, and **Phillip Kane**, Senior Manager, Client Services, at the end of last year.

Dean **Professor William Levack** acknowledged Phillip's 28 years of leadership on the campus, during which he served as a dedicated member of Wellington's senior leadership team and as a strong advocate for the campus at a University-level.

Phillip held a number of roles during his time at Otago, working for the campus under its guises of the Wellington Medical School and the Wellington School of Medicine and Health Science before it became the University of Otago, Wellington.

Maxine retires after working for the Wellington Medical & Health Sciences Library for more than 35 years. She started her working life at Otago as a part-time library assistant in 1988 and by the end of her tenure had worked across all aspects of the library collections. Her responsibilities included the recruitment and supervising of students working part-time on evening and weekend shifts in the library.

Health Sciences Librarian **Kareen Carter** paid tribute to Maxine's friendship, her tenacity in solving problems and her attention to detail.

"Our latest move, to the Ward Support Block, has been made much easier by the work Maxine did in the 18 months prior to her retirement."

Maxine returned to campus in May for a temporary role assisting Department of Public Health staff with their move to Hanson Street.



Maxine Schutte



Phillip Kane

## Obituary

### Dr Ruth Toumu'a 1977-2024



A much-loved, gifted and highly-valued academic colleague, mentor and friend, **Dr Ruth Toumu'a**, Associate Dean (Pacific) on the Wellington campus and Lecturer for the Higher Education Development Centre, died suddenly on 15 May.

Dr Toumu'a had a PhD in Applied Linguistics and a Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). She had more than 15 years' experience in the tertiary education sector in New Zealand and in the Pacific Region.

At Otago, her work focused on providing specialist coaching consultations and support for both staff and students in academic skills and literacy development. She was passionate about supporting all her students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, and those for whom English was an additional language, fostering successful independent learners at all levels from first-year students to PhD candidates.

Dean and Head of Campus **Professor William Levack** said Dr Toumu'a would be remembered for her kind, calm demeanour, her thoughtfulness and her commitment to supporting students and staff.

"During her time at the University, she was instrumental in helping hundreds of university students complete their research qualifications, postgraduate qualifications, and clinical training.

"Her work leaves a lasting legacy in the lives of the people she has helped and guided."

She is survived by her husband Tu'ikolongahau (Tu'i), sons Bryan and Joshua and her mother, Doris.

A fuller article about her incredible life and work will follow in the *Otago Bulletin*.