

# Research reaps rewards

Last month over 2200 graduands took to the streets of Takapuna for AUT University's Winter Graduation ceremony. These included 20 Doctorate recipients.

For UK export and registered psychologist Alice Theadom, graduation was the culmination of many years of hard work. Theadom's Doctor of Philosophy explores sleep difficulties in Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS) patients.

"This has been a particularly challenging area of research as not a lot is known about Fibromyalgia, but through it all it has been very fulfilling."

Fibromyalgia is thought to arise from irregularities in the central nervous system, causing severe joint/muscle pain and chronic fatigue. Theadom says that because Fibromyalgia is an invisible condition and is often confused with Chronic Fatigue syndrome, it can be very difficult for patients to feel understood and to manage their symptoms.

"Up to 5% of the population is thought to be affected by Fibromyalgia. It is a serious condition which can impact upon peoples ability to manage family life and stay in employment," she says.

Sleep is essential for health and wellbeing, and is one of the most important recovery mechanisms available to humans. Sleep disturbance is one of the key difficulties for people diagnosed with FMS, says Theadom.

"Poor sleep quality has a profound influence on peoples lives, affecting other symptoms of the condition such as pain and fatigue, as well as reducing their ability to engage in daily activities. Difficulties with waking-up during the night and feeling alert were found to have the most impact, with people experiencing 'blocks of sleep' lasting two to three hours throughout the night. Psychological factors such as low mood, high levels of stress and negative expectations of sleep were found to be linked with poor sleep quality."

Theadom currently has several reasons to celebrate; in addition to graduating she has since returned to the UK to get married.

When she returns to New Zealand, Theadom will continue her work in



Dr Alice Theadom, AUT University graduate

a joint role with AUT University's National Institute for Stroke and Applied Neurosciences and the Person Centred Research Centre, where she is the ABI Rehabilitation Senior Research Fellow. Theadom is involved in a wide range of research projects including Traumatic Brain Injury, Neurorehabilitation and Fibromyalgia Syndrome.

## Pro Vice-Chancellor's Perspective

Last month Winter Graduation was held at the Bruce Mason Centre, following processions through Takapuna. For most students Graduation marks the successful culmination of three to four years of study. It is a time for them, their families, friends and classmates to celebrate. As a Dean my role is to call each student onto the stage to be capped by the Chancellor. They walk on as graduands, they walk off - with loud applause - as graduates. This year a record number graduated with doctoral degrees - the University's highest qualification.

Recent weeks also saw the opening of an impressive new food sensory testing facility and a trial where AUT's Warkworth radio telescope successfully linked with similar facilities in Australia to investigate what might be two black holes orbiting each other. Also of particular note was the University's Business School receiving accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business - thereby joining the top five percent of business schools in the world.

Amidst these and other high points, the University community experienced a huge loss with the passing of our Chancellor, Sir Paul Reeves. Sir Paul was

ill at the time of Graduation and did not attend, probably the only time since he was elected Chancellor in 2005. His passing leaves a large gap, not only for his family, friends and the University, but for the nation and many people throughout the world.



Prof. Max Abbott  
Pro Vice-Chancellor  
AUT North Shore

As priest, bishop, Governor General, Chancellor, United Nations observer and special representative of the Commonwealth Secretary General - among many other significant roles - Sir Paul made a unique and substantial contribution. He embraced human diversity in heart and deed. He challenged injustice and inequality. He touched lives in positive ways. He supported others to do likewise. He personified determination, compassion, dignity and humility. He reached across differences and potential chasms in New Zealand society and helped hold it together and aspire to better things. For me, and many others, Paul was a trusted mentor and friend.

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