



New Zealand Harkness Fellowships Trust
Annual Report 2025

Tēnā koutou katoa

This year has been one of **celebration, reflection, and renewed momentum**. The centenary of the Harkness Fellowships offered an extraordinary opportunity to look back on 100 years of leadership, learning, and international collaboration. From the celebrations in New Zealand to the global alumni gathering in Barcelona, the events reminded us of the enduring power of the Fellowship to shape leaders, strengthen public policy, and forge connections across borders and disciplines.

This year we also marked, with sadness, the passing of **Harkness Fellow extraordinaire, Dame Karen Poutasi**, a distinguished New Zealander whose leadership and service had a profound influence across the health and wider public service. Dame Karen embodied the values at the heart of the Harkness Fellowship – intellectual curiosity, international perspective, and a deep commitment to the public good. Her contribution leaves an enduring legacy, and she will be remembered with great respect and gratitude by many within the Harkness and public service communities.

It was a privilege to have Dame Karen with us at **our New Zealand centenary event** in September, which brought together around 100 of our Harkness community to celebrate new Fellows and hear from alumni. For the first time, healthcare Harkness Fellows and NZ general Fellows came together to recognise this milestone.

In Barcelona, New Zealand was strongly represented across the centenary programme, with Fellows contributing to panels, discussions, and workshops that showcased the unique strengths of Aotearoa's approach to leadership and public service.

It has been heartening to see alumni from both Fellowships reconnecting, sharing experiences, and renewing professional and personal ties. **Something special happens when New Zealanders travel, learn, and return: perspectives widen, system understanding deepens, and the motivation to drive change at home grows.**

The centenary also highlighted the richness and diversity of our alumni network – and the importance of nurturing it. Our collective ability to influence policy, improve systems, and deliver outcomes depends increasingly on collaboration across countries, sectors, and institutions.

The major challenges facing the world – climate change, ageing populations, artificial intelligence, geopolitical instability, and rising expectations on public and social services – will require new ways of working and thinking. The Harkness community has always been a place where new ideas take root, and this year has shown how vital those connections remain.

The year also marked **a strengthening of key partnerships**, including with the Leadership Development Centre and The Commonwealth Fund of New York. We were delighted to host Reginald Williams, Senior Vice President of International Health Policy & Practice at The Commonwealth Fund for a few days in August to attend our New Zealand centenary celebrations. With Fulbright NZ, we convened a Fellowship Funders' Roundtable, enabling discussion between international fellowship funders. We continued our collaboration with the Axford Fellowships, via crossover Board membership, and sustained relationships across the public service.

The centenary is an opportunity to look forward.

A centenary is not only a celebration of the past – it is an inflection point. The Board believes this is the right time to look ahead, and to refine and renew our strategy for the next decade.

We want to build on the renewed energy created through the alumni celebrations, and to consider how the Fellowship can maximise its impact.

This includes bringing together healthcare and general Fellows as one alumni community, strengthening our partnership with the Axford Fellowship, articulating and lifting the visibility of our values, and having a steady eye to where we focus our efforts in the next 5–10 years – while keeping in view the next 100. This strategic conversation must consider the global context already unfolding around us: a changing geopolitical landscape, climate adaptation, ageing societies, and rapidly evolving technology.

We should ask how the Fellowships can contribute to addressing these issues by developing the leaders New Zealand's future requires, while deepening international collaboration. This could involve growing the Fellowship offerings available, or exploring partnerships and learning beyond our traditional US focus.

As kaitiaki of the Fellowship and its endowment in Aotearoa, we are committed to safeguarding the legacy of the first 100 years of Harkness Fellowships, while ensuring the Fellowship is positioned to thrive in the next 100. I am particularly proud of the quiet, often unrecognised work undertaken this year by Board members and our partners at the Leadership Development Centre to strengthen our financial position, our governance, and our systems – work that underpins the impact Fellows are able to make.

On behalf of the Board, **thank you to everyone who has contributed this year** – Fellows, alumni, partners, funders, staff, and supporters. Your commitment and belief in the value of international experience to strengthen public leadership remains at the heart of the Harkness story in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Aphra Green

Board Chair

Harkness Fellowships New Zealand Trust



Our vision

Harkness Fellowships develop public service leaders through a sought-after fellowship experience in the USA

Focus areas and key actions for 2025

Select leaders with impact

- ✓ **Refine and promote selection process** with Leadership Development Centre
- ✓ **Enhance mentoring and leadership support** for Fellows through connection with alumni network and LDC
- ✓ **Develop pipeline of future applicants** through engagement and promotional activities

Lift visibility of Fellowship through relationships & engagement

- ✓ **Promote Fellows and fellowships** through publication of reports and ensuring dissemination of fellowship findings
- ✓ **Engage and re-energise Fellows network** through Harkness 100 year celebration and via enhanced communications on LinkedIn and by email
- ✓ **Maintain and build on relationships** with key stakeholders, including Ministers and MPs, public service leadership, other Fellowship funders and relevant government agencies

Strengthen governance, administration, financial position

- ✓ **Formalise and build on relationship** with Leadership Development Centre
- ✓ **Refresh Board membership** in critical expertise areas
- ✓ **Strengthen financial position** by continuing to manage the fund well, seeking funding opportunities as they arise
- ✓ **Create an enduring document management system**, shared across Board

In 2025 we:

- ✓ **Refined and promoted the selection process** with the Leadership Development Centre
- ✓ **Enhanced mentoring and leadership support** for Fellows through connection with alumni network and LDC
- ✓ **Developed the pipeline of future applicants** through engagement and promotional activities

Refined and promote 2025 selection process:

This year's selection process ran smoothly, thanks to our strong relationship with the LDC. However, we had a small number of applicants, due to uncertainties both in the NZ public service and in the United States.

Enhanced mentoring and leadership support for Fellows:

Harkness Fellows now receive pre-departure and post-return leadership coaching sessions with the LDC, and have a dedicated Board point of contact for the duration of their Fellowship. They also have access to the wider alumni network, which we are gradually accessing informally and connecting new Fellows with where their topic is relevant. Through our significant engagement and promotional activities this year we have renewed interest in the Fellowships, and will be starting to **develop a pipeline of future applicants.**



2025 Fellow: Hākopa Ashdown

Hākopa Ashdown (Te Aupōuri, Ngai Takoto, Ngāti Kahu) undertook a prestigious research residency at the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School, later this year. Ashdown's project, *Lessons Learned from the United States – Indigenous Economic Growth and Development in Underserved Communities*, examined successful US policies and initiatives that have accelerated economic growth for indigenous and economically disadvantaged communities. His research sought to understand how Special Economic Zones have attracted private capital into low-income communities designated as 'Opportunity Zones', and how communities have established their own Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) to address access to capital issues. Through the Fellowship, his intention was to generate practical recommendations for New Zealand policymakers and iwi to improve economic growth.

Looking ahead to 2026

In the coming year, Board activity will aim to:

- ❑ **Grow the applicant pipeline** through extensive engagement and communications, in partnership with the Leadership Development Centre.
- ❑ **Strengthen pre- and post-Fellowship support**, embedding existing coaching, mentoring and leadership reflection as standard elements of the Fellowship experience.
- ❑ **Clarify selection criteria** to more strongly articulate our values, and to remove barriers to applicants.
- ❑ **Deepen connections between Fellows and alumni**, and across the wider Harkness/Axford community, to encourage greater topic-based engagements and peer support.
- ❑ **Monitor international context risks** (including visa, geopolitical, and institutional settings) to ensure Fellowship placements remain high-quality and viable.

Opportunities since returning

Many people have reached out since my return to NZ and I've been delighted to share insights from my Fellowship more informally with diverse public and private sector colleagues. This included speaking with LDC staff refreshing senior leadership training with AI content.

I have also had the opportunity to join different AI events or processes and bring my perspectives to the discussion – including an AI Forum New Zealand panel on AI and productivity, a Standards NZ sub-committee reviewing international standards on AI for NZ adoption, and a DIA-led group providing input to an AI Assurance framework for government.

I remain in contact with my host organisation and, given their close affiliation with the leading thinktank in India, am interested to explore possible collaboration around the India AI Impact Summit being hosted in New Delhi in early 2026. This is a Ministerial-level event to which New Zealand has been invited.

Reflections on leadership impact of Fellowship

"I feel the Fellowship has given a boost to my thought leadership and public sector leadership skills. It particularly reinforced my global perspective and deepened my appreciation for how politics, economics and ethical/societal considerations combine to influence policy making. Being exposed to diverse perspectives sharpens your ability to both critique and accept different viewpoints, and also to communicate multifaceted ideas and positions, which I think is important for navigating leadership in an increasingly technologically complex environment. I've moved to an exciting new role, setting up a new public research organisation in advanced technology, and am looking forward to more challenges in the future."

Presentations / webinars

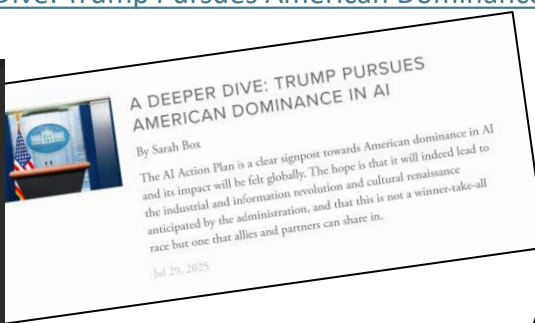
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment – Technology and Innovation and Economic Development branches
- Treasury
- DPMC Policy Project lunchtime series
- Informal report-back to US State Department officials in Wellington

Podcasts

- The Business of Tech "AI Policy under Trump – What it means for NZ" [The Business of Tech | iHeart](#) (3 April 2025)

Publications / articles

- Fellowship report online
- ORF America Background Paper [The Road Ahead for U.S. Policy on Artificial Intelligence — ORF America](#) (April 2025)
- ORF America Comment [A Deeper Dive: Trump Pursues American Dominance in AI — ORF America](#) (July 2025)



In 2025 we:

- ✓ **Promoted Fellows and fellowships** through publication of reports and ensuring dissemination of fellowship findings
- ✓ **Engaged and re-energised the Fellows network** through Harkness @100 celebration and via enhanced communications on LinkedIn and by email
- ✓ **Maintained and built on relationships** with key stakeholders, including Ministers and MPs, public service leadership, other Fellowship funders and relevant government agencies

Promotional activities:

We published this year's Fellowship reports and continued to promote Fellows' work through targeted channels. The LinkedIn page established last year has continued to grow, with promotion and cross-posting by the Commonwealth Fund widening reach. Significant promotional activity was undertaken around the 100-year celebration of the Fellowship, with past Fellows providing reflections on the impact of the Fellowship for them – these went on the website and LinkedIn. Updates were posted regularly to increase visibility of the programme and its impact. Presentations and profiling of the 2024 and 2025 Fellows occurred throughout the year.

Engaging the Fellows network:

The Harkness @100 celebration was a highlight, drawing in a broader group of alumni and reinforcing the long-standing contribution of the programme. This event served to reinvigorate the wider Harkness network, drawing in healthcare Fellows and establishing an alumni group comprising both Health and General Fellows. We now have an updated distribution list for all Fellows.

Maintaining and building on relationships:

Two Government Ministers were able to attend the Harkness @100 celebration – it was a highlight to have them there. Visibility with CEs was maintained through LDC Communications. Contact with the US Embassy and MFAT continued, ensuring sustained support and alignment across both Fellowships. The refreshed relationship with Hāpai Public was built on, with further opportunities identified to profile Fellows and promote the Fellowship through their networks. We now have a regular slot in the Hāpai Public journal for Fellows to contribute an article to on their return.

Looking ahead to 2026

In the coming year, Board activity will aim to:

- Consolidate and activate a unified alumni network**, bringing together health and general Fellows through purposeful engagement.
- Increase visibility of Fellows' work**, with a stronger emphasis on publishing and sharing the work of Fellows and the impact they are having.
- Strengthen senior-leader and Ministerial engagement**, ensuring continued awareness of the Fellowship's contribution to public sector capability.
- Build on international relationships** established through the centenary, particularly with UK, Australian and Canadian Harkness networks.
- Continue collaboration with peer fellowship funders**, staying connected informally and via the Fellowship Funders' Roundtable.

The Annual Fellows' dinner was a special event this year, celebrating the centenary of the Fellowships, two Harkness Fellows – Hākopa Ashdown and Reza Jerrall (Harkness Fellow in Health Policy) – and bringing together almost 100 Fellows and friends. Thank you to the Commonwealth Fund for its support of the event, and to Reginald Williams for coming from the United States to celebrate with us.



Hākopa Ashdown, Aimee Hadrup, Joe Beaglehole, Jym Clark, Judge Caren Fox, Diane Owenga



Patrick Smellie, Hākopa Ashdown, Jym Clark, Claire Aitken, Grace Smit



Hākopa's grandmother (seated) and great aunts



Sir Richard Faulstich, Aphra Green



Hon Tama Pōtaka, Hākopa Ashdown, Hon Shane Jones



Hon Tama Pōtaka, Hākopa Ashdown, Judge Caren Fox, Peter Douglas, Hon Shane Jones



Justice Sir Bruce Robertson, Maureen Cameron



Ross Tanner



John Boshier, Roger Blakeley



Aphra Green, Rosemary & Neville Trendle



Grace Smit, Judge Caren Fox, Magali Ruiz, Hākopa Ashdown, Dave Samuels, Andrew Kibblewhite



Sir Richard Faulstich, Cindy Farquhar



Penelope Borland, Peter Griffin, Joe Beaglehole



Hon Shane Jones



Laurence Zwimpfer, Murray Milner, Neville Trendle



John Coughlan (centre) and sons



Ian Town, Juliet Rumball-Smith, Jono Hoogerbrug, Andrew Old, Audrey Sonerson



Peter Griffin, Bryce Wilkinson



Andrew Old, Audrey Sonerson, John Boshier, Ian Town, Roger Blakeley, Rebecca Kitteridge



Andrew Old, Ross Tanner, Ian Town



Jono Hoogerbrug, Reginald Williams, Jane Kinsey



Murray Milner, Maureen Cameron, John Boashier



Simon Murdoch, Lauren Summersell, Roy Ferguson

Centenary celebrations 13-16 November 2025

The Harkness @100 Centenary Celebration in Barcelona brought together alumni and Fellows from across the globe for four days of discussion, reflection, and collaboration. New Zealand was strongly represented, with a contingent drawn from both the Health and General Fellowships, contributing actively to panels, workshops, and discussions. The overarching themes explored throughout the event — including leadership in complex systems, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and the enduring value of international policy exchange — were highly relevant to New Zealand’s current public-sector context.

The gathering also strengthened international connections, with meaningful engagement between the New Zealand delegation, the UK Harkness Fellows’ Association, and the Australian Harkness Fellows Network. These renewed relationships signal opportunities for joint initiatives, aligned alumni activity, and a more connected transnational fellowship community.

A notable highlight of the Centenary was the Commonwealth Fund’s announcement of a new leadership fellowship, which will support outgoing US Fellows from 2027. Throughout the event, there was also substantial discussion about the importance of the ‘general’ Harkness Fellowship — its role in nurturing broader public-policy leadership, and its unique contribution alongside the sector-specific health programme.





Reflection on Harkness @100 event

Dr Jono Hoogerbrug

Senior Harkness Fellow 22/23

A few weeks of distance have helped me reflect on the Harkness @100 event, the centennial celebration for the **Harkness Fellowships** in Barcelona. An incredible opportunity to connect with fellows across time and space.

🌐 First reflection - Kiwis on the world stage! I couldn't help but feel immense pride to see so many Kiwis presenting their experiences and stories on such a global and prestigious stages.

🗣️ Second - The trust gap. While we spend a lot of time asking why people don't trust institutions, we don't ask the hard question: are we actually being trustworthy? One speaker noted that we treat everything like a knowledge distribution problem, when it's often whether people trust the messenger. Another pointed out that building trust requires stepping into the emotional space, not just the 'rational' one.

🌍 Third - In NZ we look up but not across. We often look to our larger anglophone neighbours - Australia, UK etc - but hearing about Costa Rica and its high life expectancy relative to GDP teaches us so much about how they fund healthcare and where they put their efforts. The constitutional right to health, funding sitting outside typical political influence, and decisions delegated to communities, achieves remarkable outcomes with modest resources.

📏 Fourth - The age-old saying is 'what gets measured gets managed' but as one clinical speaker noted, when they're with the patient, the whole world slows down to focus on what matters most, connection. Because not everything that can be measured, matters.

🤝 Fifth - Diversity of thought is still a gap. The most powerful critique came from an attendee: "I can't believe how inward-looking health is." If we only talk to ourselves, we'll keep defending a status quo that isn't working for too many people.

⚠️ Further challenging reflections came in many forms from perspectives on climate, conflict, patient experience, institutional capture, diverse political realities and the experience from non-healthcare fellows.

🚀 Final thought - while at times the globe can seem impossibly big, disconnected and fraught, special events like these remind us otherwise. A remarkable time where you can spark up a conversation with a stranger and instantly recognise our common humanity and shared mission. We need to do more of this.

REFLECTIONS

100 years of the Harkness Fellowships and why these fellowships matter to you

In 2025, the Harkness Fellowships celebrate 100 years of fostering international exchange, policy innovation, and leadership in public service. Aphra Green, Chair of the New Zealand Harkness Trust Board, outlines the history of the fellowships and their impact for New Zealand – and, most importantly, the fellowships’ opportunity for emerging leaders in the Public Service.



AUTHOR
Aphra Green

In the Public Service, we see complex challenges up close – and we often know there’s more than one way to address them. What if you could spend up to 12 months in the United States, diving deep into how they solve problems similar to ours, building an international network of peers, and returning home with game-changing ideas and the confidence to implement them?

That’s exactly what the Harkness Fellowships offer. For 100 years, this programme has been giving mid-career professionals an experience that Fellows consistently describe as “life-changing” and “profound”.

It speaks to the impact of these fellowships that we now have not one but two distinct and complementary Harkness Fellowships available to New Zealanders – one focusing on **healthcare policy and practice**, and one focusing on **building leaders in the Public Service**.

A legacy of international collaboration
Originally known as the Commonwealth Fund Fellowships, they were later renamed in honour of the Harkness family – philanthropist Edward Stephen Harkness, the philanthropist whose endowment made the programme possible, and his mother Anna Harkness, who founded the Commonwealth Fund in 1918. The fellowships were designed to promote international understanding and intellectual exchange between the United States and other nations, and at their heart was a simple but powerful premise: that by living and studying

abroad, emerging leaders would return home with new ideas, deeper insight, and a broader perspective on policy and public life.

When the Commonwealth Fund focused these fellowships on healthcare policy and practice, a small group of New Zealand Harkness alumni established our own fellowship offering, which was funded through an endowment by the New Zealand Government in 2014.

Impact for New Zealand

Across the decades, more than **120 New Zealanders** have been selected as Harkness Fellows, and their leadership continues to shape many public sector institutions and thinking today. A scan of that list reveals that either fellowship selectors had a knack for identifying future achievers, or that the fellowship itself played a role in propelling the careers and impact of many – perhaps a little of both.

Fellows have had significant roles in the branches of governments, becoming judges, ministers, and senior public servants. Some Fellows have shaped how New Zealanders understand the world – through shaping the policy agenda, academia, and significant contributions to journalism. The focus of the Commonwealth Fund’s fellowships on healthcare policy and practice means there is now a sizeable group of Fellows who have transformed how New Zealand delivers health – particularly for those with the greatest needs.

Importantly, these exchanges have never been one-way. New Zealand Fellows have also shared their expertise with United States institutions, peers, and mentors, influencing policy thinking abroad and contributing to global debates on health care, governance, and public service reform both during and after their fellowship experiences.



PHILANTHROPIST EDWARD HARKNESS

Over the last year, as I have contemplated how to measure and communicate the impact of these fellowships for Aotearoa New Zealand, I have come to the realisation that some things are best left uncounted. It is not possible to meaningfully quantify the ideas seeded, friendships formed, networks built, synapses ignited, insights consolidated, and policies shaped.

Harkness Fellowships into the future – reflecting on the next 100 years

A review of that list of 120 Fellows also tells the story of how we have thought about leadership potential in New Zealand, and how progressive some of that thinking has been. Women and Māori leaders were early fellowship recipients, and that diversity has continued.

As we celebrate 100 years of the Harkness Fellowships, the question is not just how far we've come – but where we go next. As we face increasingly complex challenges – climate change, technological disruption, demographic shifts – the value of international learning and exchange of ideas supported by the Harkness Fellowships is clearer than ever. The fellowships offer public servants time to reflect, space to be curious, and a chance to bring the best of global thinking home.

It is not possible to meaningfully quantify the ideas seeded, friendships formed, networks built, synapses ignited, insights consolidated, and policies shaped.

The Commonwealth Fund is bringing together the entire Harkness community in-person in November 2025; and its 2027-28 Harkness Fellowship round will open in June 2026. Applications for the New Zealand Harkness Fellowship open in early 2026. More information is available [here](#).



2025 RECIPIENTS: JACOB (HĀKOPA) ASHDOWN (ABOVE LEFT) WAS THE 2025 RECIPIENT OF THE NEW ZEALAND HARKNESS FELLOWSHIP, AND REZA JARRAL (ABOVE RIGHT) WAS THE 2025 RECIPIENT OF THE 2025-26 HARKNESS FELLOWSHIP IN HEALTHCARE POLICY AND PRACTICE.



If you're interested, start by identifying what you're most curious about in your current role. What keeps you up at night? What policy challenges does New Zealand face that the United States has tackled differently? That curiosity could be the foundation of your fellowship application.

The fellowships offer public servants time to reflect, space to be curious, and a chance to bring the best of global thinking home.

UNITED STATES TO NEW ZEALAND

The Ian Axford Fellowships in Public Policy, administered by Fulbright New Zealand, also reinforce the links between New Zealand and the United States. These fellowships are sponsored by New Zealand government agencies and provide United States recipients with the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge of public policy in New Zealand.

Aphra Green is the Chair of the New Zealand Harkness Trust Board and was the 2015 New Zealand Harkness Fellow. Her Fellowship enabled her to work within the United States Federal Department of Justice, looking at evidence-based approaches to criminal justice reforms. Her Fellowship led to extensive United States-New Zealand collaboration on justice issues, with a number of United States justice officials visiting New Zealand in the years following her Fellowship. She has held leadership roles in the Ministry of Justice and Oranga Tamariki and is currently the Deputy Chief Executive System Performance and Investment Advice at the Social Investment Agency.

SOME OF THE CURRENT AND FORMER PUBLIC SERVANTS WHO HAVE BEEN RECIPIENTS OF THE HARKNESS FELLOWSHIP:

Dr Dale Bramley: Chief Executive, Health NZ

Peter Te Matakahere Douglas: Director, Child Protection Investigation Unit, Oranga Tamariki

Sir Richard Faulk: Professor of anatomy and Director of the Centre for Brain Research at the University of Auckland

Aimee Hadrup: Manager, Tamariki Wellbeing at The Southern Initiative, Auckland Council. See Aimee's Hāpai Public article [here](#).

Peter Hughes: Public Service Commissioner (2018-2024)

Andrew Kibblewhite: Secretary for Justice, previously Chief Executive of DPMC

Dr Andrew Old: Deputy Director-General of Public Health, Ministry of Health

Diane Owenga: Programme Director, The Policy Project, DPMC (2017-2023)

Dame Karen Poutasi: Director-General of Health (1995-2006), Chief Executive NZQA (2006-2020)

Kara Puketapu: Secretary of Māori Affairs (1977-1983)

Ross Tanner: previous Deputy State Services Commissioner and former President of IPANZ (now Hāpai Public)

Sir Collin Tukuitonga KNZM: Associate Dean Pacific, University of Auckland

In August, to coincide with Reginald Williams' visit to NZ, the New Zealand Harkness Fellowships Trust Board and Fulbright NZ convened a roundtable discussion of fellowship funders in New Zealand to explore how we strengthen our collaboration and work together to develop the leaders we need for the complex challenges of our time.

The Roundtable brought together representatives from the NZ Harkness Fellowship, Axford Fellowships, Borrin Foundation, Fulbright New Zealand, Winston Churchill Trust NZ, and Edmund Hillary Fellowships, to meet with Reggie and to discuss shared challenges and opportunities in the fellowship ecosystem. Participants noted pressures across the sector, including reductions in government funding for professional development, staffing constraints, and the need to maintain high-quality applicant pipelines. Several funders highlighted the importance of ensuring fellowships remain complementary to – rather than substitutes for – government investment, while also recognising the unique value fellowships bring through leadership development, cross-sector exchange, and alumni communities.

The discussion surfaced significant opportunities for collaboration, particularly around alumni engagement, thought leadership, and strengthening connections to the US and international policy community. Ideas included joint events, shared seminars, coordinated reporting, podcasts, and more intentional storytelling about the long-term impacts of fellowship experiences. The group also explored ways to deepen links between Fellows across programmes, with interest in coordinating and inviting others' Fellows and alumni to key events.

There was strong interest in building a more connected fellowship network across Aotearoa–New Zealand. Participants agreed that deeper collaboration – including aligned design conversations, shared data, and a stronger discipline of capturing and publishing Fellows' insights – would enhance the collective impact of all fellowships. We committed to continue working together, sharing key dates, and exploring joint initiatives in 2026.





Obituary: Dame Karen Poutasi

Dame Karen Poutasi (1949–2026) was one of Aotearoa New Zealand’s most distinguished public service leaders — a public health physician, system reformer, and mentor whose career spanned health, education, and public sector governance. She passed away on 1 January 2026, leaving a legacy that continues to shape public service leadership and public policy across the country.

Dame Karen’s connection to the Harkness community was both personal and enduring. As a Harkness Fellow at the Harvard School of Public Health, she completed a Master of Science in Health Services Administration — experience that helped shape her systems-thinking approach to public management and reform. She later served as Chair of the New Zealand Committee for Harkness Fellowships, supporting and mentoring generations of Fellows and strengthening the

programme’s contribution to New Zealand’s policy capability and leadership pipeline.

Across more than three decades of service, Dame Karen held some of the most consequential leadership roles in the New Zealand public sector. She served as Director-General of Health from 1995 to 2006 – the first woman to hold the role – and oversaw major health system reforms, including the implementation of recommendations from the Cartwright Inquiry, early national responses to HIV/AIDS, and major shifts in primary care delivery.

She went on to serve as Chief Executive of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority for 14 years, guiding the organisation through significant change and strengthening quality and equity across the education system, including the introduction of digital assessment approaches.

In later years, Dame Karen continued to accept complex and high-trust public assignments. These included serving as Commissioner for the Waikato District Health Board, contributing to governance of the national COVID-19 vaccination programme, and chairing Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora during a period of system transition. Her governance and advisory work also extended to child protection reform, higher education leadership, and public service system improvement.

Dame Karen was widely recognised for combining technical expertise with values-driven leadership. Colleagues consistently described her professionalism, integrity, humility, and unwavering commitment to public service and health equity. Her work focused on improving outcomes for all New Zealanders, particularly addressing inequities affecting Māori and Pacific communities. She was appointed Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2006 for services to health administration, and later made a Dame Companion in 2020 for services to education and the state.

For the Harkness community, Dame Karen embodied the Fellowship’s core values: intellectual curiosity, service to the public good, and the application of global insight to local challenges. As both Fellow and leader, she demonstrated how international learning can translate into enduring national impact.

Dame Karen will be remembered not only for the institutions she helped build and strengthen, but for the generations of public servants she influenced through her example — principled, pragmatic, and deeply committed to improving the wellbeing of communities across Aotearoa.

In 2025 we:

- ✓ **Formalised and built on relationship** with Leadership Development Centre
- ✓ **Refreshed Board membership** in critical expertise areas
- ✓ **Strengthened financial position** by continuing to manage fund well, seeking funding opportunities as they arise
- ✓ **Created an enduring document management system**, shared across the Board

This year we **continued our partnership with the Leadership Development Centre**, and have signed an updated relationship memorandum, which formalises and builds on our relationship.

We also took steps to **refresh our Board membership**, welcoming Aimee Hadrup to the Board and identifying further areas where specialist expertise will be valuable in future appointments. In particular, this year we have searched for a new Treasurer, to take over from John Boshier, long-time Board member and treasurer. We were pleased to have John indicate his wish to continue on the Board and to stay on in this role for now.

The financial position of the endowment remains very strong, with prudent fund management in place.

Operationally, we **established an enduring document-management system shared across the Board**, along with a comprehensive mailing list for all Fellows and a dedicated Board email system. Together, these improvements support more consistent management of Board documentation, communication, and processes.

Looking ahead to 2026

In the coming year, the Board's focus will be on:

- Maintaining and enhancing Board capability**, including addressing any skills gaps through new appointments.
- Enhancing our financial position**, balancing prudent fund management with opportunities to support the growth of our impact through the Fellowship.
- Embedding improved governance and systems**, ensuring continuity, transparency and resilience, and responding to new legal requirements relating to Incorporated Societies.
- Deepening our partnerships** with the Leadership Development Centre and Axford Fellowships Trust Board, building on already strong working relationships.
- Strengthening succession and continuity planning**, ensuring stewardship of the Fellowship endowment across future decades.



Aphra Green (Chair), Harkness Fellow 2015



John Boshier (Treasurer), Harkness Fellow 1976



Heather Baggott Deputy Public Service Commissioner, Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission



Peter Griffin, Harkness Fellow 2012



Aimee Hadrup, Harkness Fellow 2023



Roy Ferguson, Axford Board Chair