

New Samoa alumni chapter receives warm welcome



Talei Esera (left) and Aysha Rimoni at the Samoa alumni chapter launch.

The announcement of a new chapter in the relationship between the University of Otago, its alumni and the Pacific region received a warm welcome in Samoa last month.

About 150 alumni and guests gathered in Apia on 1 October to celebrate the launch of the University of Otago Samoan Alumni Chapter.

Otago Deputy Vice-Chancellor (External Engagement) Professor Helen Nicholson headed the University delegation to Samoa and says staff very much enjoyed renewing links with alumni and forging new friendships with people in the wider community.

“On a personal level, I greatly appreciated the opportunity to discuss Otago’s initiatives in the Pacific – in health, research and teaching – with the people who helped make them a reality, and to thank Samoa for the contribution its students make to our University community.”



Chapter Patron Honourable Le Mamea Ropati Mualia and Professor Helen Nicholson and with (right) Honourable Sili Epa Tuioti, the Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, who was guest speaker at the launch.

Professor Nicholson says alumni have a key role to play in promoting the University; sharing experiences of studying at Otago may help recruit postgraduate and undergraduate students.

Aside from direct funding for scholarships, alumni can support students through internships, providing networks for them and by offering them employment in Samoa after they graduate.

“Please also think of Otago if research is needed in Samoa, as our staff and students would love the opportunity to help,” she says.

Professor Nicholson has been a National University of Samoa (NUS) Council member for the past two years and also attended an NUS council meeting while in Samoa.



Tofilau Nina Kirifi-Alai (left) and Dr Tootooleaava Fanaafi Aiono Letagaloa

University of Otago Pacific Islands Centre Manager Tofilau Nina Kirifi-Alai, who was event master of ceremonies, says it was “wonderful to see such energy, interest, enthusiasm and strong emotional ties to Otago in the room.”

“From the moment we arrived in Samoa our visits with Otago alumni, friends, partners and the New Zealand High Commission showed the launch of the new Samoan chapter was much anticipated.”

While the launch event gave alumni the opportunity to reminisce and share fond memories of campus days, they also showed a genuine interest in hearing about the future direction of the relationship between the Pacific and Otago, she says.

“Also, from the University’s perspective, it is humbling to see how our alumni are contributing in their local communities in so many ways. An added bonus was meeting many alumni who have sons, daughters or grandchildren currently studying at Otago and we really enjoyed the opportunity to acknowledge the richness Pacific Island students bring to Otago’s New Zealand campuses while studying.”

Development and Alumni Relations Office engagement manager Diana Dobbison said following the “highly successful” launch the new chapter had held a meeting and initiated a membership drive. Alumni and Chapter members had also been instrumental in having discussions with several prospective postgraduate and undergraduate students, she says.

The University was honoured to have Deputy Head of State (and Otago alumnus), the Honourable Le Mamea Ropati Mualia accept the position of inaugural Chapter Patron and to welcome the Honourable Sili Epa Tuioti, the Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to speak at the launch.

Honourable Mualia achieved a national first when he graduated from his studies at Otago in 1970 and became New Zealand’s first Samoan pharmacy graduate.

In the past two decades about 660 students who identified as Samoan have completed an Otago qualification.



(From left) Sebastian Tasi, Faamanu Diana Mualia and Leilani Pereira-Moeono.