

# EDITORIAL

WENDY MCGUINNESS

*TalentNZ* showcases a project inspired by the late Sir Paul Callaghan, a passionate New Zealander who cared deeply about the future of this country and its young people.

Sir Paul approached New Zealand's future as a physicist – he looked into the particular in order to make sense of the general; the world we live in. His book *Wool to Weta* in many ways reflected his personal journey from physicist to philosopher. There were many characteristics to admire about Sir Paul, but the one that resonates most with this project is his dream; he dared us to dream about our country, and in doing so he invited us to join him in a journey to make New Zealand a *place where talent wants to live*.

This project could not have come about without a great deal of support. Sir Paul was a great storyteller, so it is appropriate to start at the beginning, to tell why I was looking for someone like Sir Paul, someone who not only understood the challenges for small countries in the 21st century, but was prepared to work and think hard about our country's future. As he so often said, 'Why not New Zealand?'

The Institute began in 2004 as my response to a lack of discussion about New Zealand's long-term future. At that stage I did not know how to run a think tank; all I knew was that there were challenges ahead and that we needed to be both smart and lucky to weather the storms of the 21st century.



I spent a lot of those early years looking overseas, seeking methods and models for analysing the future of countries. This took me to think tanks in Australia, the United States and England. I also attended conferences and joined international organisations with a view to learn how to develop national scenarios; what methods worked and what did not.

While I was looking outward, Sir Paul was looking inward. He went hunting in New Zealand, looking at the specific to understand the general. He looked at New Zealand as a living organism, identifying microcosms of activity, seeking out the weird stuff, playing with data, looking for causes, testing assumptions and busting myths, looking to answer the question 'What is New Zealand really good at?' To hear him talk was like having someone in front of you hold New Zealand in their hands; this big green mass was then turned over, stretched, scrutinised and generally put

under his scientific microscope. Just as suddenly, he would roll New Zealand into a ball, like plasticine, and throw it at you – well, what do you think? This is what made him unique; the ability to go from the specific to the general and back again, all in a matter of minutes.

## The 'Aha' moment

There is always an 'Aha' moment, a moment in time when a big idea catapults into your consciousness, bringing about a change in both direction and momentum. Sir Paul said his was when he realised science

was not enough; science is great at solving problems but it cannot tell us how to live.

My 'Aha' moment came at 36,000 feet, as I was flying back from Washington DC in 2008 after attending my first World Futures conference. The night before I had had dinner with about 15 conference attendees from around the world; I was new, so I simply sat quietly listening to this new language. The conversation evolved throughout the evening, moving from a discussion about emerging problems and forward engagement to what countries might be game-changers in the 21st century. The discussion went along the following lines:

- America is too much like an elephant (either a slow sway or a stampede).
- England, and in reality the whole of Europe, will take years creating an effective EU, so their energy will be diverted to creating effective ways

to work together, influential but not necessarily creating a new paradigm.

- Australia can live off its resources, so no impetus for change there (although recent events, such as a decrease in China's demand for resources, may change this).
- China will be struggling with its transformation and trying to establish its place in the world, reducing its ability to think and act differently.

When the plates were cleared and the coffee arrived, five countries came to the top of the list: two were Nordic, two were from South America, and the fifth was New Zealand. The reasoning was that these countries shared common traits: the citizens were nimble, creative, inquiring, well-educated, well-travelled, and embraced cultural diversity. Their governance structures were transparent, democratic and stable. Their economies were developed (and thus could invest in change), they had diverse energy options (optionality) and they had good supplies of natural resources. Lastly, these countries could be trusted not only to deliver on what they promised, but were also able to work collaboratively with other nations to resolve complex issues without having their values and beliefs compromised – in other words they were not afraid to speak up. As a result, they generally punched well above their weight in global affairs.

My 'Aha' moment came 24 hours later, somewhere over the Pacific. I found myself mulling over the conversation from the night before, possibly feeling a tad smug. But then, I was hit with an epiphany: the realisation that, if the world's future depended on New Zealand, we had a lot of work to do. We could not just rest on our laurels; the world needed us to be the best we could be. By the time my feet touched the tarmac in Auckland, the idea of a national workshop mapping New Zealand's long-term future had been conceived.

To set the context for the workshop, I needed a very special keynote speaker. Not just a speaker with gravitas, vision and charm but, most importantly, someone who understood what it meant to be a New Zealander – someone at home in their own skin. I literally went hunting, shadowing prospective speakers throughout New Zealand. But it was not long before

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I found my target – Sir Paul Callaghan. He was perfect; not only did he understand the problem, but he was working on the solution.

In late 2010 Sir Paul was very unwell, and he told me he simply was not up to it. But, not one to give up, I kept in email contact. There was considerable pressure to find someone else to fill the keynote-speaker slot but, as I had hoped, Sir Paul came through. Three weeks before the *StrategyNZ* workshop,

in March 2011, he told me, 'Wendy, I am up for it.' Unbeknown to me, he had been quietly working away on his narrative. After his keynote address (which can be seen on YouTube) he received a standing ovation. He launched the workshop like a rocketship – we were off.

Sir Paul's proposition was about focus; what we as a country did not focus on was just as important as what we did focus on. He dug deep into what New Zealanders were good at, and in doing so shattered a number of myths. New Zealand's economy has traditionally been agriculture-based. Sir Paul's thesis was that we should become a talent-based economy (hence his book *Wool to Weta*). His solution was a vision statement that has now been embraced by many New Zealanders – *a place where talent wants to live*. These seven words had been carefully crafted by Sir Paul over many years: he had had conversations in school halls and lecture theatres around the world; he had played with data late into the night; he had explored our shared history and developed a deep respect for Māori worldviews, but most importantly, he had spent many hours reflecting and observing us all, putting New Zealand under the microscope.

This journal explores ways to turn Sir Paul's vision into reality by putting 'creating' in the forefront, in effect inviting all Kiwis, including those non-New Zealanders who are simply Kiwis at heart, to join in the journey toward making New Zealand a talent-based economy.

The aim of *TalentNZ* is to test whether Sir Paul's vision can be put into practice, and if so, how. His vision has a number of characteristics that previous approaches have lacked: it proposes a shared journey (everyone can be involved – we can work either individually or together toward a shared goal); it provides an opportunity to 'pause' (to realign with our values,

have a clean slate, and regenerate at a range of levels – individually, locally or nationally); it aligns with our ‘can do’ attitude, our desire to work hard and play harder (the process is fun and positive, it invites us to be both radical and creative); it brings our young people into sharp focus (they are integral to the vision), and we know that if we go on this journey we will create a cool country at the bottom of the planet – *a place where talent wants to live*.

Put bluntly, the opposite of Sir Paul’s vision – New Zealand without talent – would deliver a very different future. Countries that understand the new currency and act on it will get first-mover advantage. We need to be quick and nimble – and this journal aims to put some additional fuel in the tank, helping to propel us into a future that we want.

### **The big idea**

We asked 30 kiwis 7 questions and in return we received 210 ideas. These 30 interviews, undertaken by the two winners of the *Sir Paul Callaghan Science Meets Humanities Scholarships* Charlotte Greenfield and Darren Zhang, focus on talent and make up the first and major narrative of this journal. The photos of the interviewees are designed to expose more of their characters – not *what*, but *who* they are. Their interviews can be found on the following pages, or searched by individual, question, talent or location on the website [talentnz.org](http://talentnz.org).

### **Defining a talent-based economy**

As you will read, the interviewees put forward a very clear view of what a talent-based economy might look like: crucially wealth is derived from talented people, doing what they do well – working hard, being creative and delivering value. In contrast to a knowledge-based economy, resource-based economy or an agricultural-based economy, the focus is on people rather than information, mineral deposits or agriculture. We can all be part of a talent-based

economy, we can teach our youth to be curious, confident and effective communicators and we can provide a hand-up, supporting youth as they make their way in the world. The solution is as much about culture and a way of life, as trying to predict which products and services will be in demand in ten years’ time.

From a government perspective, a talent-based economy is one where public policy is both durable and evidence-based, ensuring we are not simply relying on silver bullets or propaganda to drive reactive change. Both local and central government are key to creating *a place where talent wants to live*. The second section of the journal takes a closer look at cities, in particular how Mayors are working hard to create talent-hubs. Throughout the interview process it became increasingly clear that cities played a central role in creating a talent-based economy. The third and final section centres on the economy, and includes contributions from Sir Paul and other thinkers. It finishes with a chart on public expenditure that highlights central government’s role in creating a talent-based economy (see page 110).

Most importantly we feel that a talent based economy has at its heart, its people; as this well-known proverb states:

*He aha te mea nui o te ao?  
He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!*

*What is the most important thing in the world?*

*It is people! It is people! It is people!*

### **Acknowledgements**

As to the idea, it evolved, but there were some ‘Aha’ moments; insights from Sir Paul’s wife Miang; conversations with Peter Allport and Andrew Coy from Magritek (the company Sir Paul had founded) and talking practicalities with John Trail, also from Magritek. John later offered to help, an offer I leapt at.

He tested our thinking, assessed the scholarship winners (page 74), tweaked the seven questions (page 5), pursued several of the 30 Kiwis (page 49), and unwaveringly supported this project.

Our special thanks go to Sam Morgan for providing both the introduction and the funds from Jasmine Social Investments, for Charlotte and Darren for taking up the challenge, to Shaun Hendy and Hayden Glass for their contributions and to our 30 Kiwis for taking the time to become involved.

While we were undertaking the interview process, a number of people told us what a great idea it was and that it would be excellent to publish the results in journal format. We also thought it was a great idea, but in order to make it happen the Institute needed additional support. Thank you to Willis Bond & Co. who underwrote the publication. Thanks to Sue and Pip Elliott for their valuable advice and input. Further, the team at the Institute, and in particular Hannah Steiner, have my complete loyalty and respect; if you want to move a mountain, they are the team to do it – thank you.

This initiative could not have happened without the involvement of many people, but at its centre sits Sir Paul. To know Paul was to know his deep love and respect for his wife Miang, his unwavering sense of purpose, and his love and admiration for his children and grandchildren. These factors, combined with his amazing analytical skills and his love of this country’s fresh air, clean running water and great walking tracks, delivered New Zealand an extraordinary leader, one who left an exceptional gift – a vision for this country. We thank Sir Paul for his hard work, his curiosity, and his love of this country. He not only marked a track forward during difficult times, he invited us all to join him on a journey toward a better country and a better life for our children.