

## U21 joint PhD with Auckland

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In May 2009, Universitas 21 established a unique framework for jointly awarded PhDs. Unlike a number of other joint degree programmes, under this scheme two partner universities will create a tailor-made programme of study for each student, taking individual research needs into account and enabling collaboration with another of the network's universities.

Megan Schlotjes was the first University of Birmingham and University of Auckland recipient of the Universitas Scholarship and her study abroad seems to have been a resounding success. She has since gone on to work for the World Bank in Sydney.

There are clear benefits for students of these jointly awarded PhDs: An academic research programme enhanced by the collaboration of two different high quality research environments and cultures; training and facilities of two research-intensive universities; the added value of international networking; and a head start in future career planning and professional development.

Megan had two supervisors; Dr Michael Burrow, School of Civil Engineering here in Birmingham, and Dr Theuns Henning at the University of Auckland. Some thoughts about how they perceived the joint PhD are given below to give you an insight into the arrangement.

### Megan Schlotjes, U21 PhD graduate

"When the University of Auckland published an announcement in one of their University news publications that they had signed the U21 Joint PhD Memorandum of Understanding, I jumped at the chance to be involved. I had always wanted to travel overseas and with the announcement of the Joint PhD, I could see myself overseas sooner with my PhD studies than initially thought.

As a result of signing onto the programme, I spent 15 months of my studies at the University of Birmingham in the UK. Not only did this provide me a hop, skip and a jump to Europe, I also had the support, inputs and perspectives from other academics throughout my PhD journey which I believe has added significant value to my research and its outputs. The overall experience further enriched both my professional development in the Transportation industry and my personal growth.

I look back favourably on my UK based OE {overseas experience} with very memorable achievements both in the academic world and personally. I now look forward to the challenges and further professional development growth at the World Bank, where I currently work with international governments on a variety of projects in the Pacific from investigating runway pavements to facilitating sustainable energy alternatives to developing safe and efficient maritime operations."

### Dr Michael Burrow, University of Birmingham



"Megan's Universitas 21 (U21) PhD was the very first of its kind for the University of Birmingham with successes on several fronts. It has enabled Birmingham and Auckland to further cement their ties in leading research worldwide in the field of highway engineering.

Megan's work has been ground-breaking in the development of an expert system which marries human expertise and computer modelling to develop a sophisticated process capable of predicting the structural failure of roads. To achieve this, complimentary expertise in both groups was exploited and built upon.

A number of papers have been published or are in the system awaiting publication which demonstrates Megan's achievements. Whilst we have got on very well as a team, a huge credit for the success of the project is due to Megan who has proved to be an outstanding model student. Dr Theuns Henning also deserves a great deal of praise for leading the work and being an exceptional professional in his area, from whom I have learnt a great deal over the course of the project.

The U21 teams at both organisations also deserve congratulations on facilitating the process and ensuring things have gone smoothly."

### Dr Theuns Henning, University of Auckland

"Megan spent 15 months studying at the University of Birmingham thus giving her the international exposure for her research but also allowing her to do the typical Kiwi OE experience at the same time, allowing her to spend St Patrick's Day in Ireland, ANZAC day in Gallipoli and the Queen's Jubilee in London. Megan has submitted her PhD and is now in examination process.

The Universitas 21 holds much value for local students; especially those wanting to do their OE can now do it as part of the PhD process. So instead of going overseas and working to support their travel, they can be paid to spend time overseas as part of their PhD study.

To be able to undertake a major research project overseas is a life-enriching experience and could be invaluable to a person's career development. It also allows local students to combine a top rated local qualification with a top rated international qualification thus truly offering literally and physically the best of both worlds."



