

MITO and Inspiring Futures Foundation scholarship recipient off to Harvard

Michelle Findlater, Dealer Principal of Southern Automobiles, is the 2025 recipient of the Janet Lane MNZM Scholarship, awarded by MITO and the Inspiring Futures Foundation in their [annual scholarship awards](#). Michelle will use this scholarship to complete the Harvard Division of Continuing Education's Certificate of Leadership Excellence in Strategy and Innovation.

The Janet Lane MNZM Scholarship is awarded to a single individual each year to support an intensive and comprehensive course of management and leadership study. Named to honour MITO's former longstanding chief executive Janet Lane, the scholarship is designed to enhance and accelerate opportunities for individuals whose development of leadership capabilities will have a significant impact on the performance, productivity, and profitability of their sector.

Michelle Findlater, who has over twenty years' experience in the automotive sector, is just such an individual. Prior to joining Southern Automobiles in 2024, she held senior roles at Scania NZ and GWD Motor Group, and has a demonstrated commitment to governance and leadership. She has also shown an exceptional dedication to continued learning, having recently completed Bachelor's and Master's degrees in applied management alongside her employment. Earlier in her career Michelle completed MITO's [Certificate in Automotive Electrical Engineering](#) and [Certificate in Business \(First Line Management\)](#). In 2016, she won the MTA's Female Achievement in the Motor Industry award, and in 2021, she completed the MTA's Aspiring Directors programme.

Michelle is delighted to have been awarded this scholarship: "This opportunity represents a critical step in my academic and professional journey, and I look forward to the possibility of learning from and contributing to the esteemed Harvard community with the support of MITO and the Inspiring Futures Foundation."

The certificate programme will take a year to 18 months to complete and Michelle, who, as a condition of the scholarship, has already registered with and been accepted by the Harvard Division of Continuing Education, will begin her studies immediately.

She will complete three of the required four courses online, and travel to Harvard to complete one course on-campus: "This in-person experience will be an invaluable opportunity for networking and learning from global leaders."

The courses she will take range from advanced business strategy and strategic sales management to leading successful change and leveraging Artificial Intelligence to boost business efficiency and growth. Michelle is confident that these courses will enhance both her professional development and personal leadership journey.

"Harvard University is well known for its academic rigour and commitment to fostering innovation and leadership. I'm really excited to learn from an institution at the cutting-edge of knowledge and to gain the skills I'll need to navigate our rapidly evolving business landscape. I believe my studies will help me enhance our business performance at Southern Automobiles, and will also allow me to foster innovation, strategy, and effective leadership in my future governance roles in the automotive community."

Ken Cummings, the owner and board chair of Southern Automobiles and Michelle's employer, fully supported her scholarship application.

"Michelle has only been with us for a few months, but I am already impressed by her dedication and leadership within our dealership. This scholarship will provide Michelle with invaluable training

opportunities that align perfectly with our company's goals and vision. Her participation in this programme will enhance her capabilities and further contribute to the success of our business."

Verna Niao, Executive Director of MITO, says that Michelle is exactly the kind of person the scholarship was intended to support. "MITO is committed to enabling our industries to achieve their development and training goals. This scholarship is designed to grow our talent at the senior leadership level, and Michelle's aspirations are very exciting and should be of great benefit, not only to her current employer, but to the wider automotive sector. I look forward to seeing her progress as a leader."

Sturrock Saunders, Convenor and Chair of the Inspiring Futures Foundation board, says, "We are very pleased to be able to award this scholarship to an emerging leader such as Michelle. There was a competitive field of applicants but Michelle's vision and desire to make a meaningful contribution to the automotive sector really stood out. It's fantastic to be able to support this kind of educational opportunity for the long-term benefit of our industries."

For more information on the MITO and Inspiring Futures Foundation scholarship programme, visit MITO's website: mito.nz

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