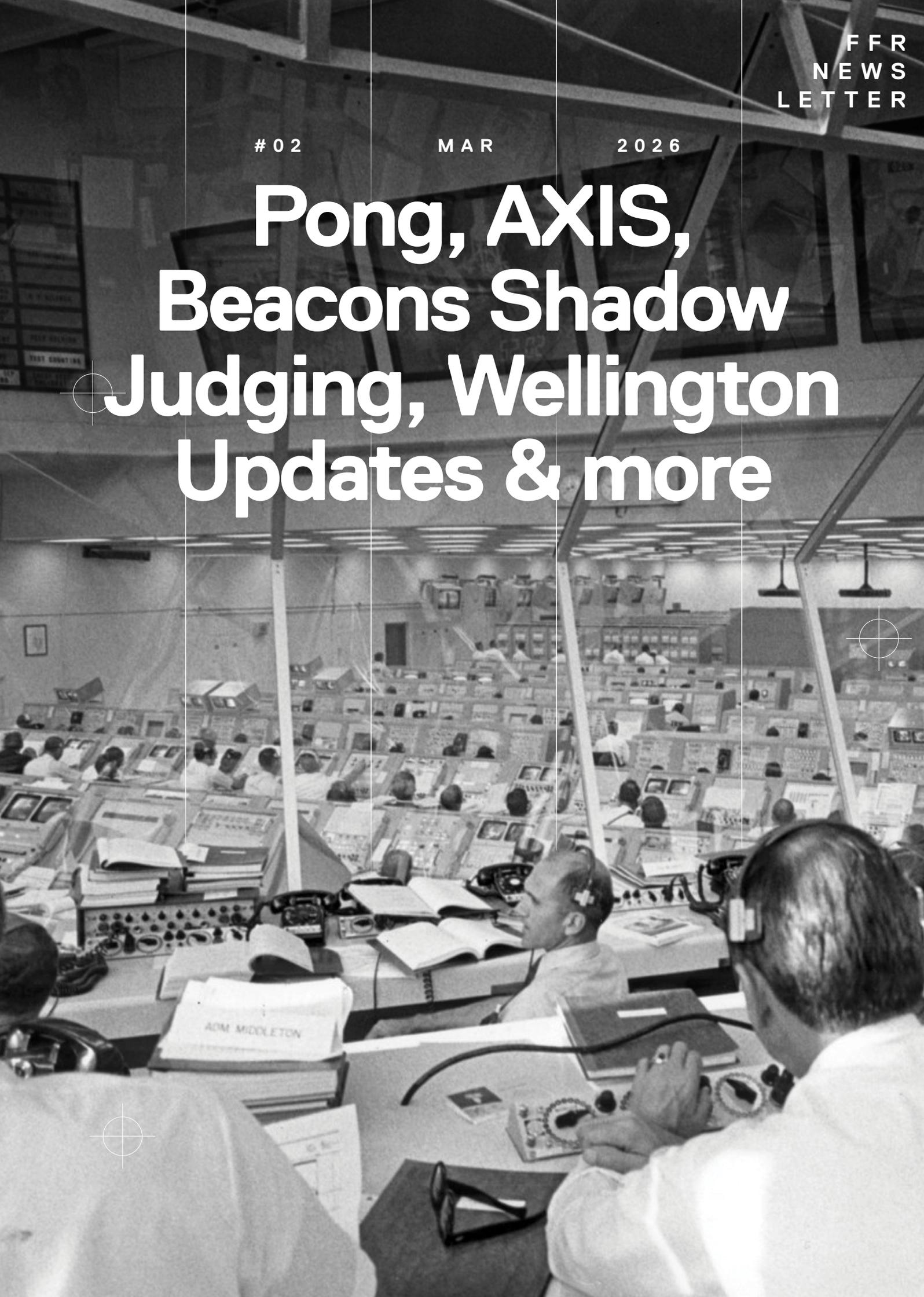


02

MAR

2026

Pong, AXIS, Beacons Shadow Judging, Wellington Updates & more



Contents

Kia ora - - - - -	3
Wellington News - - - - -	4
Beacons Shadow Judging - - - - -	5
Pong Tournament Wrap up - - - - -	6
Coffee Mornings - - - - -	8
Young Lions - - - - -	9
Congratulations to all our AXIS 2026 Winners - -	10
Mind Expansion - - - - -	11



Kiia Ora

Hello dear readers,

Welcome to the March edition of the First Five Rungs newsletter. Summer's on its way out, autumn's making a slightly dramatic entrance, and we're all pretending we didn't just get used to leaving the house without a jacket.

Now, the question that really matters: is this the year Uggs sneak their way into agency dress codes? Bold of them to try. Bold of us to consider it.

This month, we're yapping about the latest updates for First Five Rungs across Wellington and Auckland, fresh opportunities for future award show judges and recapping the journey that was the Young Lions Aotearoa experience.

Wellington News

Our Latest Event

We had the best time at our first event of the year: Drag Bingo at Dirty Little Secret. Overlooking Wellington on a good day, what a great way to start our year.

Coming up next

Our next event is going to be focused around managing burnout.

We have four speakers from various agencies with a wealth of knowledge and experience, who we are excited to hear from (listed below). They will touch on their personal experience in the industry across client side, media side, and supplier side. There will be a focus on how to manage/avoid burnout, how to better balance work/life balance and ending on some benefits of working in a faced paced industry. This is diarised for the 9th of April at Special, Wellington.

SPEAKERS

- + Georgia McNaught (Together)
- + Alana Allen (Special)
- + Mareike Papez (MBM)
- + Jemma Titheridge (VML)

People Updates

Our wonderful Travanna and Freya will be leaving FFR.

Our WLG board now consists of Emma Tansley (VML), Molly Missen (FCB), Rosie Bea Stoddart (Special), Stefanos Hills (MBM) and Jordan McVicar (OMD).





BEACON
AWARDS

APPLY NOW

SHADOW
JUDGING



Beacons Shadow Judging

FFR Shadow Judging applications are open all year — and right now, the **Beacon Awards judging is on the horizon.**

We're looking for emerging media and strategy talent to sit alongside senior leaders and contribute to the judging conversation.

This is a rare chance to deepen your understanding of media effectiveness — and grow your perspective in real time.

If you're ready to learn from the best — apply now.

Head to the website to learn more and apply: <https://commsCouncil.nz/awards/shadow-judging>

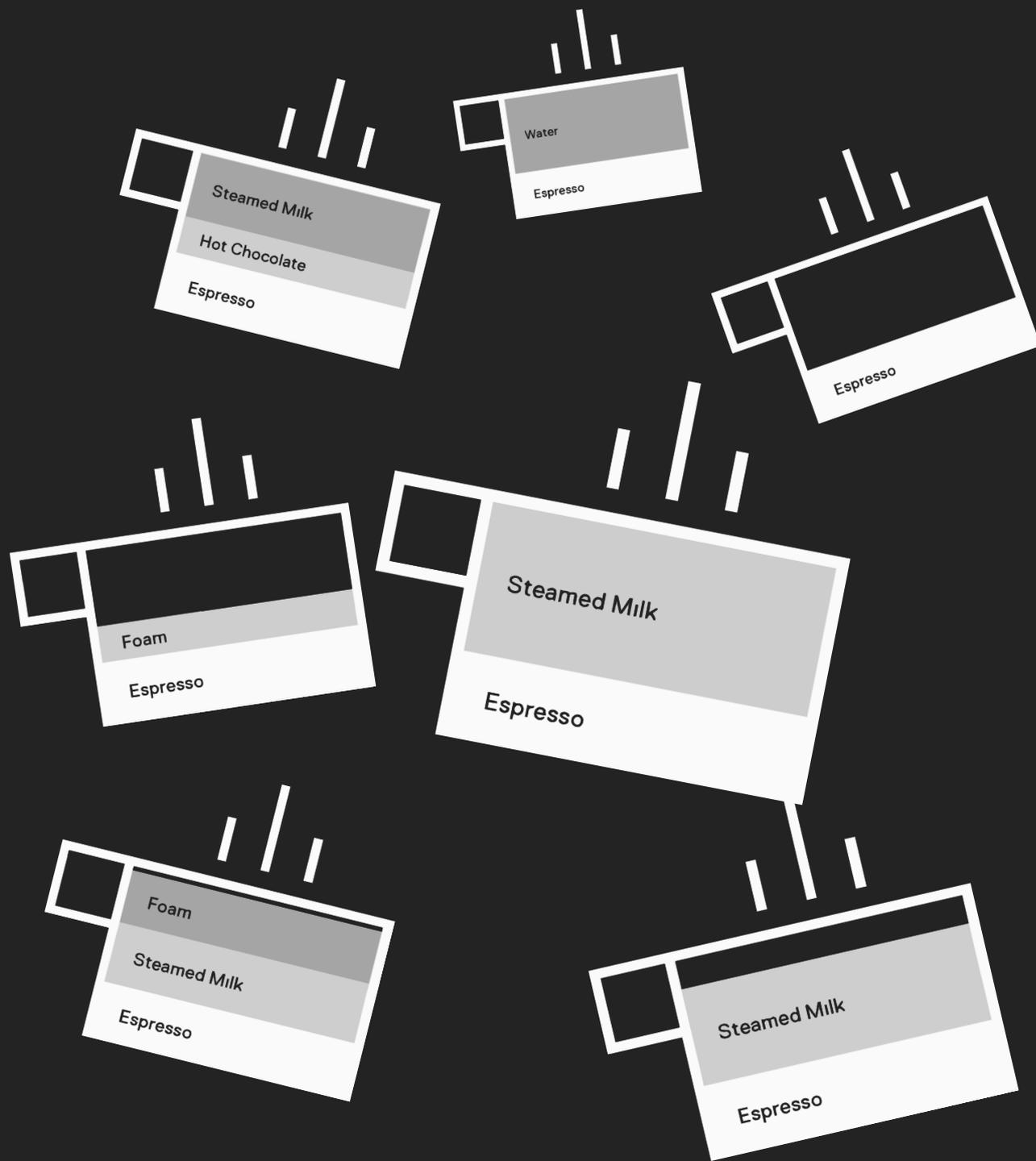


Pong Tournament Wrap up

What a turn-out!

It was amazing to see so many faces come out to bring home the FFR Pong Title. Congratulations to Jay and Olive - A.K.A **Team Help Me I'm Stuck Inside a Team Name** took out the crown, bringing the FFR Pong Tournament winning glory home to **TBWA\ NZ**. We hope you enjoy practicing your swing at Flush Golf/Bar Ziti. Special mention to Vinesh and Paige, our runners-up from MBM who received a double pass to go cut some shapes at Synthony.





Coffee Mornings

This April, we're launching Beans and Briefs - a FFR-led coffee morning series for early birds to connect and catch up over coffee. Our first session is at Blue in Ponsonby on Thursday, April 2nd, so we hope to see you there. We'll send out a reminder closer to the time!

Young Lions

Big ups to this year's Young Lions winners who were announced at the Axis Speaks event. What an amazing achievement! Enjoy the rosé, and do our nation proud!

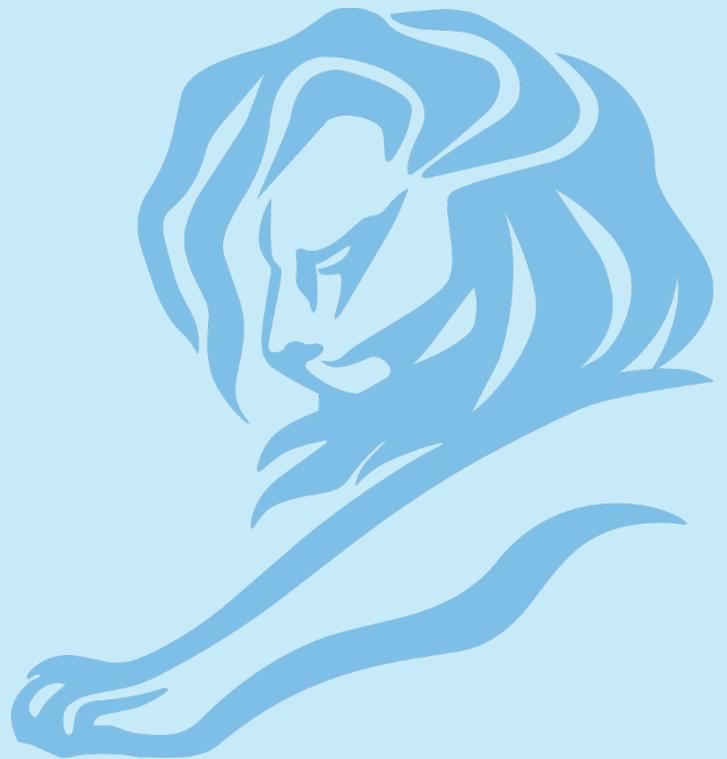
YOUNG LIONS WINNERS:

MEDIA

Wendy Zhang & MJ Keung from Dentsu

CREATIVE

Riana McKenzie & Zoe Perrin from Colenso BBDO



Here's a quick word from the Comms Council who were supremely impressed at the calibre of this year's entries:

The Young Lions Competition drew a huge number of entries this year. The briefs for Film and Media categories addressed two distinct challenges posed by Predator Free New Zealand. 68 teams entered the competition, making the judges' job challenging. The quality of entries was impressive, and the Comms Council would like to thank everyone who participated. The winners of each category will be announced at Axis Speaks on March 26 at Viaduct Event Centre. As ever, the winners will compete on behalf of Aotearoa New Zealand in Cannes, at the global Young Lions Competition in June.



Congratulations to all our AXIS 2026 Winners

What a night it was at the AXIS Awards 2026—huge congratulations to all the winners who lit up the Viaduct with work that was clever, heartfelt, and downright show-offy in the best possible way. And a special shoutout to the brilliant emerging talent winners, whose fresh ideas and fearless craft reminded everyone that the future of our industry is looking pretty spectacular.

EMERGING TALENT WINNERS

**Zachery Riddell &
Willow Whitham**

Liv McClymont

Mind Expansion

Here's what the FFR crew have been a bit kinda maybe obsessed with lately:



Lily ♥'s - [The JFK/Carolyn Bessette biopic Love Story](#)

Carolyn Bessette is an icon. She was a PR icon, and a seriously cool chick.



Vinny ♥'s - [Sublime](#)

A Pinterest-like inspiration app that organises your thoughts and serves you related ideas to spark creativity. For people who like musing and collecting ideas. Like a calm, aesthetically pleasing way of bookmarking.



Crystal ♥'s - [Rental Family](#)

Hands down, my movie of 2026 (technically released in 2025 but didn't make it to Kiwi shores until this year). It's a beautiful snapshot into the intricacies of daily life in Japan, that you tend to miss when you visit on holiday. Watch this if you love Brendan Fraser, but also watch this if you hate Brendan Fraser.



Andrew ♥'s - [Nik Goodner](#)

For creative's looking for a bit of inspiration, Nik covers the effectiveness of creative campaigns, whether you're looking for cultural insights or finding your creative voice.