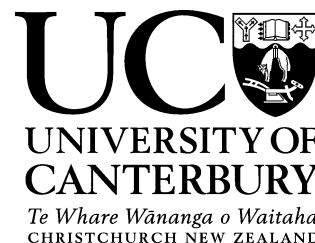


# Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council



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**March 2024**

## **Introduction**

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Term 1 has ended and the April graduation ceremonies are underway. UC has record enrolment numbers for the fourth year in a row and the graduation ceremonies will be our largest. The 2024 enrolments tally includes record numbers of Māori and Pacific students, with a headcount of 2,180 Māori students and 753 Pacific students, an increase of 9% and 11% respectively compared to the same time last year. School leavers from Canterbury are up 11% and the university continues to attract students from outside the region. There are 1,549 international students currently enrolled (including Study Abroad students who stay for one semester), a rise of 12% on the previous year.

For the sector, the headline news has been the appointment of two advisory groups both chaired by Sir Peter Gluckman: the University Advisory Group (UAG) and the Science System Advisory Group. The terms of reference are wide-ranging, covering the broad question on how these sectors can contribute more significantly to the country's productivity and economic growth. The UAG, tasked with evaluating the effectiveness of the current university system, will run in parallel to the Science System Advisory Group and the Advisory Groups will prepare recommendations to government by early 2025 to inform the 2026 budget. The Science Advisory Group will review New Zealand's contestable research funding and the structure and operation of the Crown Research Institutes with the goal to improve the impact of New Zealand's research investment. Having both groups chaired by Professor Gluckman is so that potential integration across the research sector can be fully explored. The government also announced that the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) Quality Evaluation scheduled for 2026 has been cancelled.

## **Engagement**

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At a reception in the Parliamentary Building on 20 March UC showcased our significant contribution to economic development in Canterbury. This message was reinforced by local UC partners Ali Adams from ChristchurchNZ and Leeann Watson from Business Canterbury. Also in attendance was Linda Falwasser from the Tāwhaki National Aerospace Centre. Minister Simmonds congratulated the University on our growing enrolment numbers, proactive approach to building strategic partnerships and responding to community needs.

ChristchurchNZ published a new strategy, Christchurch Economic Ambition, that aligns well with UC's strategic vision to 2030, Tangata Tū, Tangata Ora, as it aims to "maximise access to learning opportunities and develop the skills people and business need to build a strong workforce and a prosperous, equitable future".

Business Canterbury also aims to work more closely with its community, including a strategic partnership with UC. Over half of Waitaha Canterbury's NCEA-qualified students choose to study at UC and one in two of our graduates who remain in New Zealand join the workforce in Canterbury. Therefore, we

welcomed the opportunity to work more closely with Business Canterbury as we prepare our graduates for the rapidly changing world of work and drive our economy forward.

The Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year Awards Gala was held at the Auckland Viaduct Event Centre on 27 March. UC was the category sponsor for the Young New Zealander of the Year Award Te Mātātahi o te Tau. Brett Berquist presented the award to the 2024 winner, Simran Kaur, founder of @Girls That Invest, a media company that has grown into an online phenomenon. She worked hard to close the gender gap in investing, helping millions of women learn how to generate wealth.

On 13 March we co-hosted the annual conference luncheon with Tourism New Zealand and ChristchurchNZ. The event provided an opportunity for 36 academics to learn about Tourism New Zealand's conference assistance programme that provides funding and support to bid for and host conferences. The focus of the event was to build connections over a light lunch and encourage academic staff to consider bidding for conferences.

## **Education – Accessible, Flexible Future Focussed**

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The first term of the 2024 academic year went quickly with more students both on campus and online. Students have been taking advantage of the range of academic offerings on campus, including academic skill workshops, Student Accessibility Services, Careers, and work-integrated learning. All services are reporting greater interactions with students as they seek supports and new opportunities. The growth in students means challenges for staff to accommodate larger lectures and assessment activities. Future Learning and Development has been working with Faculties to support course design to offer more flexible and streamlined options.

Our on-campus students have been well-engaged this term so far, as evidenced by increased use of spaces on campus. For instance, the library saw another increase in the past month, up another 25% of foot traffic compared to this time last year. Likewise Kia Angitu initiatives are remaining popular and growing. The PALS coordinator has recorded a surge in attendance as a result of widening offerings and increased student enrolment numbers. This growth is welcomed due to the high impact the PALS programme has on academic outcomes for students. Teaching staff have reported positive engagement in classes during the first term. Finally, Te Kakau a Māui participation in the enrichment programme is exceeding expectations with significantly higher overall retention and pass rates from the 2023 cohort. This impactful programme will be set to deliver again in 2024.

## **Research – Impact on a Changing World**

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A number of researchers have been active either in discussing their research with the community or publishing key findings. Patrick O'Sullivan (Classics) gave an invited public lecture at the Christchurch Art Gallery on March 16th: *'Out of Time: Greek Myth and Art Across the World and Across the Centuries'*, Christchurch Art Gallery, Te Puna o Waiwhetū, for the *'Out of Time'* Exhibition.

Sally Gaw and Laura Revell from the School of Physical and Chemical Sciences and their PhD students Alex Aves and Helena Ruffell published a paper in *Atmospheric Environment* titled *"Modelled sources of airborne microplastics collected at a remote Southern Hemisphere site"*. This report will serve as the basis for a working paper to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in May in Kochi, India.

Further research relevant to the Antarctic is seen in Michelle LaRue's and PhD student Rose Foster-Dyer's article in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* entitled *"Advances in remote sensing of emperor penguins"*. This research combined novel satellite imagery and ground validation surveys to observe population fluctuations.

Covid-19 had a profound impact on scientific research, tourism and policymaking in Antarctica, according to research by Associate Professor Daniela Liggett, the lead author of a new research paper called *'How the Covid-19 pandemic signalled the demise of Antarctic exceptionalism'*.

In the area of research impact on policy, Heather Craig, Tom Wilson, Carol Stewart and Fiapaipai Auapaau led a workshop in Wellington in March for rural and primary industry policy advisors and decision makers. The workshop shared the latest insights into volcanic risk and resilience and discussed strategic options for government sector support during volcanic activity.

The University congratulates Professor Dan Zhao of Mechanical Engineering for being elected to the Academy of the Royal Society Te Apārangi. The Fellowship recognises researchers, scholars, and innovators throughout Aotearoa New Zealand who have achieved excellence in their discipline across science, technology, and the humanities.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) released its annual World University Rankings by Subject results on 10 April. Geography, Linguistics and Civil and Structural Engineering maintained their positions within the top 100 against other universities around the globe. Geography is also now ranked first equal in Aotearoa New Zealand. In total, 12 subjects ranked in the top 250 in the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2024. In addition to the above subjects, they are Agriculture and Forestry, Psychology, Earth and Marine Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Geology, Geophysics, Education, Law, and Political and International Studies.

## **People – Nurturing Staff, Thriving Students**

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Unity Week NZ in mid March is a series of events to remember lives lost in the 2019 mosque attacks. UC's participation in the week included a presentation at a Unity Week public conference by Usman Afzali, Muslim Diversity Study Postdoctoral Research Fellow and Lecturer, and wellbeing education for our Muslim students from Muslim Wellbeing Advisor Adifatah Ibrahim. Wellbeing support has also been provided to Muslim students during Ramadan.

A Think First safety campaign for students is being run during Semester One. This includes messaging via a variety of on-campus and social media that includes information about a range of topics including UC's smokefree and vape-free policy, the Assura health and safety app, emergency procedures, the Help Point towers, and the UC Security team.

The online learning module "Introduction to Health and Safety" was launched for staff on 26 March.

The Director of Equity and Wellbeing, Gilbert Taurua, has participated as a New Zealand delegate in the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The aims of the session include fostering an international collective indigenous voice on drug policy issues, and promoting indigenous-led approaches to drug demand reduction and harm reduction.

As is the case each year, free influenza vaccines for students and staff are offered by the Health Centre from the start of April.

## **Internationalisation – Locally Engaged, Globally Networked**

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Over 1,000 first-year international students were warmly received through International Welcome Events, facilitating their integration into the UC and Ōtautahi Christchurch communities. In addition, tailored transition training was provided to aid their adjustment to and enrichment of their academic and personal experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Four UC international students from Malaysia were involved in a car accident over Easter weekend near Pūkaki, Canterbury. Sadly, two of the students passed away. Our UC support team was activated on the same day as the accident and have been providing support since then. I had an opportunity to meet with the affected families to express our condolences and assure them of our support.

There was a visit from Anne Rouault, Science and Higher Education Attaché, Embassy of France, and Pauline Couteau, International affairs Officer at Sciences Po, a pre-eminent political sciences institute in France. During the visit they discussed reviewing our bilateral agreement and opportunities for greater strategic engagement through joint courses and research collaboration. Pauline informed us of Sciences Po flagship initiatives including the Institute for Environmental Transformation, their Chair for Sustainable Development and Climate Transition, and the Indo-Pacific Observatory.

The Faculty of Education hosted Professor Michaela Vogt from Bielefeld University (Germany) for 2 months. Professor Vogt is on a CATALYST Leaders' Fellowship and is working on inclusive education and pedagogy across Aotearoa New Zealand and Europe.

## **Organisational Efficacy – of a sustainable scale by 2030**

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This month saw the completion of the 2023 Annual Report and audit by Audit NZ. This was completed a month earlier than last year utilising the results of a workshop in 2023, where ways to speed up the audit process was looked at in collaboration with Audit NZ.

The Facilities Management (FM) transformation planning and implementation is underway and the Digital team rolled out the work integrated learning (WIL – for student placements) package in teacher education and other departments.

## **Environmentally Sustainable**

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To date, 1,000 students have attended events run by FM's Sustainability Office in 2024. These include tours for visiting international students, stalls for Clubs Days and the Community Garden Open Day, and a range of workshops.

Dr Joya Kemper became the Co-Chair for the Australia-New Zealand Chapter of Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). PRME is a UN-supported initiative founded in 2007 that aims to raise the profile of sustainability in business and management education. As a PRME Champion, the UC Business School has agreed to serve as a sponsor of the 2024 PRME Global Forum (virtual) in June, in support of the global effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).