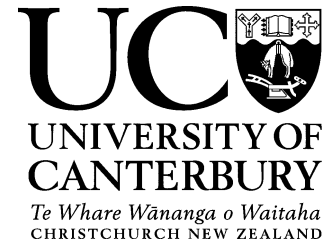


# Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council



August 2025

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## Introduction

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From a national policy perspective there are several changes under consideration that will have implications for the University.

The latest is the Minister of Education's announcement of a proposal to replace NCEA with new national qualifications. Proposed changes would be to replace NCEA Level 1 with a Foundational Award in numeracy and literacy, as well as making English and Maths compulsory until Year 11. NCEA Levels 2 and 3 would be replaced with new qualifications - the New Zealand Certificate of Education for Year 12 and the New Zealand Certificate of Education at Year 13, with minimum pass requirements and grades applied. Consultations are open until 15 September, with a final decision due at the end of the year.

Earlier this month the New Zealand Government released its International Education Going for Growth Plan, which aims to double the economic value of international education to \$7.2 billion by 2034, with clear targets for increased student enrolments, global awareness, and preference for New Zealand as a study destination. The plan proposes driving growth from high-potential markets like India and Vietnam, enhancing post-study pathways through expanded work rights, and leveraging the value of cross-cultural exchange on campus. The plan supports our intent to increase international enrolments and diversify our global reach.

At the end of June Dr John Roche, the new Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, visited UC. The visit included a roundtable discussion with representatives from Research and Innovation, the Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Health, and tours of the HIT Lab, Wireless Research Centre, and the Nano Lab. He also had a meeting with Gateway Antarctica representatives and a tour of Kōawa Studios. The visit was a valuable opportunity to connect Dr Roche with our research leaders and share information about UC's research strengths and plans.

Minister Shane Reti visited UC on Friday 1 August to view some of UC's research and commercialisation initiatives. Along with the Executive Director Finance, Keith Longden, I met with Minister Reti before accompanying him on a tour of CAPE and Kōawa Studios. He also visited the research site mentioned in a UC article, [The insect eating our pollution | University of Canterbury](#), and met with researchers, UC School of Earth and Environment senior lecturers Dr Maria Gutierrez Gines and Dr Ali Reza Nazmi.

During the past month the UC community was saddened to learn of the passing of two former University leaders: Vice-Chancellor Professor Albert Brownlie (VC 1977-97), and Chancellor Ian Leggett (Chancellor 1992-98). I attended their funerals and conveyed condolences to the families on behalf of UC.

In my academic capacity I accepted an invitation to be appointed as a member of the newly established International Union of Psychological Science Presidential Task Force on Psychological Science Diplomacy. The Task Force will fill a strategic role in applying psychological science in global policy, international collaboration and diplomacy to inform evidence-based solutions to global social challenges and promote cross-cultural understanding.

## Engagement

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Te Mātāpuna Mātātahi | Children's University and UC hosted a two-day campus experience event on 25-26 June, bringing together 473 children from 16 schools to explore a range of subjects and activities led by various UC academics. The children explored subjects, including Maths, Product Design and Business, as well as learning about Antarctica, Volcanology and Computer Science. This year 1,190 young learners from 42 schools will also have the opportunity to attend a Campus Experience Day at either UC or Lincoln University as part of their learning journey with Children's University.

The Doc Edge Festival, supported by Kōawa Studios as a Bronze Partner, opened in Christchurch on 16 July with a screening of the award-winning film *Mighty Indeed*. Director Vanessa Wells, filmmaker and part-time tutor at UC, won Best Director and Best New Zealand Feature, making her film eligible for consideration for the 2026 Academy Awards. As part of the Doc Edge Festival, Kōawa Studios hosted an immersive industry event *Beyond the Screen: The Future of Immersive Storytelling* on Wednesday 23 July. This was attended by industry stakeholders and UC staff and students, and featured a panel talk with director, writer and filmmaker Ian Sweeney, UC lecturer and animator Tim Budgen, US-based Emmy award-winning director Michaela Ternasky-Holland and AI Director and Artist Arthur Machado.

On Friday 25 July Mayor Phil Mager visited UC as part of the regular engagement between the City and UC. He also toured Kōawa Studios and visited Engineering.

The Faculty of Engineering officially unveiled the new name of the Department of Civil and Natural Resources Engineering on Thursday 17 July. The new name is Te Tari Pūhanga Metarahi me te Taiao | Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. The event included a number of keynote addresses and it was attended by industry stakeholders along with students, staff and alumni. The presentations reflected on the department's history, achievements and future direction.

UC in collaboration with UC Careers and Volunteering Canterbury hosted the annual Volunteering Expo on Tuesday 5 August. This year's event featured 26 not-for-profit organisations, offering a range of volunteering opportunities to staff and students, with over 400 attending throughout the three-hour event.

The project team for the new Recreation Centre, Takurua, ran a drop-in session for neighbours in early July. Ahead of the build starting, locals were able to see information about the project, and meet representatives of the UCSA, the University Recreation and Sport team and UC's construction partner Apollo Projects.

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

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With graduation at the end of August, the academic year is at the mid-point of the third term.

During the mid-semester break, many faculties continued teaching UC students but also supported local schools. The Faculty of Arts hosted NCEA Spanish and Japanese students across two days to support their studies and to work with the schools. Both days were successful with nearly 800 students across both programmes.

At the start of the second semester 30 Erskine Fellows were welcomed to UC. Erskine Fellows will be teaching students across a range of faculties and topics such as theoretical and computational mechanics and building acoustics. Eleven countries are represented this semester.

Following the release of Semester 1 grades and analysis of UCount student survey data, Analytics and Institutional Research completed another round of Kia Angitu programme analysis. Student experience for our scholarship enrichment programmes and Kaitoko first year advising was significantly positive. The PALS programme continued to predict significantly higher GPAs and pass rates.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, Professor Catherine Moran, and Associate Dean Engineering, Professor Rua Murray, shared an institutional approach to student success during the July staff hui.

Several new programmes were accepted at CUAP, including the new Master of Project Management. The new Bachelor of Health was also approved along with a new conjoint degree between the Bachelor of Social and Environmental Sustainability and Commerce, which complements the list of existing conjoint degrees.

On 11 July the UC Business School announced it has been re-accredited by both AACSB and EQUIS, reaffirming its prestigious Triple Crown status. The UC Business School is one of 141 institutions worldwide (approximately 1% of business schools) holding all three major accreditations: AACSB, EQUIS, and AMBA.

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

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On Wednesday 6 August the UC Library and Graduate School hosted our annual Research Student Showcase, celebrating the creativity, communication skills, and impact of our Doctoral and Research Master's students. Sponsored by UCSA, the event was held at Haere Roa and brought together the live finals of the Three-Minute Thesis competition, as well as a showcase of Visualise Your Thesis and Exhibit Your Thesis displays. Ali Adams, CEO of ChristchurchNZ, delivered the keynote address. Donors Emeritus Professor Eric Pawson, engineering specialists ENVCO, and environmental management experts e3Scientific generously funded some of the prizes.

Two UC PhD students Felix Goddard and Jack Patterson have been awarded New Zealand Space Scholarships in South California at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). This 3-month internship will mean working alongside scientists and engineers who are involved in world leading NASA missions.

Chemical and Process Engineering PhD Candidate Katherine (Katie) Ellis has been awarded a Science and Innovation Graduate Award from Fulbright New Zealand, Te Tūāpapa Mātauranga o Aotearoa me Amerika. Katie will research the influence of the mechanical microenvironment on endometriosis behaviour at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

PhD student Alexandra Strang (Biological Sciences) has been awarded an Ella Yelich-O'Connor Antarctica Doctoral Scholarship from Antarctica New Zealand. Alexandra's research will be *Assessing population trends in an important Ross Sea sentinel, the Adelie penguin*.

Eleven UC Connect Doctoral scholarships have been launched to address gaps in knowledge across the broad theme of sustainability (including economic, social and environmental sustainability). Co-funded with local partners, each scholarship is tailored to meet specific sector needs, ensuring that postgraduate research outcomes translate into meaningful, real-world impact.

The University had its best-ever result in the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) Endeavour Fund Smart Ideas round, with five research proposals awarded funding. The funded projects and lead investigators are:

- Professor Adrian MacDonald (Physical and Chemical Sciences): *Optimizing Next-Generation Climate Model Precipitation Projections for Improved Climate Resilience*
- Dr Rachael Wood (Chemical and Process Engineering): *3D-printed Bioscaffolds for Directional Neurite Outgrowth after Spinal Cord Injury*
- Professor Aaron Marshall (Chemical and Process Engineering): *Highly active low-cost electrodes: Exploiting the non-obvious interactions during plasma spray coating*
- Dr Leighton Watson (Mathematics & Statistics): *Next-Generation Volcanic Monitoring with Fibre Optic Technology*
- Dr Wai Wong (Civil and Environmental Engineering): *Smart transport systems: Using vehicle connectivity for safer evacuations*

University of Canterbury researchers are involved in three of the seven new joint research programmes with Singapore announced by MBIE. The research is focused on two themes: Future Foods and Healthy Ageing.

- Professor Ren Dobson (School of Biological Sciences) is leading a project within Future Foods: *A scalable, novel process for affordable, market-ready hybrid meat production*
- Dr Tracy Melzer (School of Psychology, Speech and Hearing) is involved in a project within the Healthy Ageing theme led by the University of Auckland, *An Ai-Driven Risk Score for Dementia ready for Clinical Use*
- Distinguished Professor Geoff Chase (School of Mechanical Engineering) is part of the team in another of the Healthy Ageing projects, being led from the University of Otago working on *AI-InterRAI: AI-Assisted InterRAI Assessment and Evaluation for Person-Centred Care Planning and Healthy Ageing*

Associate Professor Susie Smith was made a Fellow of Physical Education New Zealand (PENZ) at their conference in June. This award was made in recognition of her outstanding leadership in the field of Physical Education.

Associate Professor Laura Revell has been appointed to the United Nations independent panel to examine the physical and societal consequences of a nuclear war, having been nominated by the New Zealand government.

Professor Thomas Bennett and Dr Matthew Cowan were part of an international team awarded the Dalton Horizon Prize by the Royal Society of Chemistry. The team was recognised for creating a new family of hybrid glasses, the first of its kind since the 1970s.

## People – Nurturing Staff, Thriving Students

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The Term 3 Toolkit for new students included information about how to complete enrolment, organise timetables, explore the UC Libraries and take part in orientation events. Students were also advised about how to find the UC Notices website and join UC social media channels for ongoing communications.

The UCSA ran a Re-Ori programme for Semester 2, including three warm-up connection events, an International Food Festival, a Quiz Night, a Karaoke Night and CUBA (Canterbury University Boardriders' Association) JIB '25. Jibbing is where snowboarders and skiers perform tricks in an urban setting. A section of the UCSA carpark was transformed into a snow park, complete with mini ski jump. The UCSA also hosted the Winter Wellness Expo which included a further opportunity for a free Meningococcal vaccination.

The Faculty of Engineering hosted Thrive, a wellbeing event designed to support Faculty students with information about University life, including flatting. It included free pizza, and a chance to connect with UC support services.

In the 2025 Employer Branding Research survey, run by Randstad Recruitment Agency, UC is rated number one for employer attractiveness in the Tertiary Education sector. There were 4,000 survey respondents, the majority of whom are from the North Island. The University of Auckland and AUT were 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Learning and Development opportunities for staff have included the pilot of a new programme for leaders on managing performance, a team leadership course on strategy, communication and culture, a bespoke cybersecurity workshop for the Financial Services team, a mens' health webinar and a workshop on Te Reo in the workplace. The University's employee assistance programme (EAP) partner TELUS Health ran a webinar entitled *Couples: Connection and Communication*. As part of a leadership series hosted jointly by UC, University of Otago and Victoria University of Wellington, there was a workshop entitled *Leadership with Kinder Conversations*.

UC and staff now have access to new resources for supporting researchers facing online abuse. Developed by the New Zealand Science Media Centre with support from Universities New Zealand, these include guidance for research organisations, advice for staff supporting researchers facing harassment, and a checklist for staff receiving reports of online abuse.

On 1 July the Advancement team hosted a Wills Workshop for all UC staff presented by UC Foundation Trustee Andrew Oh of Duncan Cotterill. 85 attendees were offered tailored guidance on will creation followed by an opportunity for questions and answers. Feedback has been very positive.

The Think First communications campaign encouraged students and staff to focus on the fundamentals of keeping themselves and others safe during winter. Topics included allowing time for a safe commute, travel hazards such as ice, the wearing of high visibility gear by cyclists, safe behaviour at busy crossings, staying home if sick, safe use of heaters, healthy eating and sleeping, and information about access to the Health Centre and Student Care. There were also reminders about the 13 help towers and the Security team 0800 number.

The Emergency Management and Business Continuity team continues to deliver training sessions to faculties and service units to promote awareness and preparedness for emergency situations, supporting the use of [UC's Emergency Procedures Flipcharts](#) — a set of guidelines to help keep our

UC community safe. The flipcharts have recently been re-developed by our Emergency Management and Business Continuity Manager, Sonali Chandratilake, which has attracted interest from both tertiary institutions and other organisations across New Zealand for their practical applicability in emergency preparedness.

### **Health and Safety**

Minister van Velden has made an announcement proposing a change that aims to match hazardous substances requirements for university laboratories with their risk levels. This is in response to submissions from a universities working group.

Contractors and subcontractors have been reminded of the importance of disclosing medical conditions in confidence during site inductions. This is after a worker with an undeclared pre-existing medical condition suffered a seizure, from which he made a full recovery.

The Ernest Rutherford building was evacuated on 16 July when a cooling unit overheated. Despite some water damage in the affected area, the building was available for research and teaching the next day.

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

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The Semester 2 Welcome event for international students was held on Thursday 10 July, with nearly 300 new international students, including those on study abroad and exchange programmes in attendance. As a significant event in our international student calendar, the Welcome marks the beginning of a comprehensive programme of transition activities designed to support students' integration into life in Ōtautahi Christchurch and provide critical academic and cultural orientation.

Our Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) was renewed in a signing ceremony on 10 July. The MoU underpins several years of research collaboration with UC's HIT Lab NZ and UTM's ViCubeLab Research Group.

UC also hosted delegates from the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) from across Asia and the Pacific on 10 July for an on-campus gathering focused on emerging technologies and their real-world applications. Engineering Executive Dean Professor Saurabh Sinha delivered the keynote address.

During 29-31 July I attended the PIE Asia-Pacific conference in Australia, and delivered a session with Education New Zealand Chief Executive, Amanda Malu, on *New Zealand country updates and trends*.

UC welcomed a significant number of international VIP delegations to campus over the last month, with Heads of Mission from Pakistan, senior delegations from Poland, and Vice Chancellors and government officials from the Philippines all spending time on campus and in our field stations (Mt John).

The Director of Global Engagement, Dr Graham Wise, travelled to Wellington on 16 July to formalise a Letter of Intent with long-standing partner Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL), in a signing witnessed by the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia. The new agreement supports collaboration in chemical and process engineering, with a particular focus on UniKL's interest in Halal food processing.

Every year a group of UC Engineering students and staff, led by UC Mechanical Engineering Associate Professor Debbie Munro, travel to Tonga to carry out essential medical repairs and improvements. We were proud to confirm the 2026 trip in a 14 July media release.

On Monday 23 June, UC hosted the Brazilian Association of Presidents of State and Municipal Universities (ABRUEM) delegation. UNZ facilitated and coordinated the delegation's visit, which represents 46 Brazilian state and municipal universities, enabling engagements across all eight New Zealand universities. Their visit was part of a national mission to explore new partnerships across New Zealand and included a showcase of our LiDAR research and a tour of Kōawa Studios.

## **Organisational Efficacy**

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Digital Services continues to listen to feedback and implement regular updates to our student management system. Extensive preparations were made for the Semester 1 student results release in July, to ensure students and staff experienced reliable and responsive access to the Student Management system. Key improvements included upgrading our system's infrastructure to automatically accommodate higher user demand, compared with previous problems experienced during peak system use times.

The Digital Services quarterly showcase and market stall event was held on 8 July. This event, open to all UC staff, provided three presentations from UC and Digital services staff to showcase initiatives and improvements enabled by that Digital Services.

Progress continues with all the capital facilities projects. Karl Popper occupation by the Faculty of Law will take place during the mid-term break in August. This will allow consequential moves for the Business School and Faculty of Health.

## **Environmentally Sustainable**

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Staff in the EPECentre are leading a project to develop a UC Energy system. They have consulted a diverse range of stakeholders and other businesses in New Zealand to gather information on topics ranging from use and supply of biomass, to how to use heating efficiently for buildings, whether large scale battery storage is an option, and other matters. The steering group received a progress report in July.

We have used analytical tools to review how our publications over the last five years match the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), as a follow up to the tagging of our taught courses to the SDGs that we did last year. The match is quite close in some areas, with SDG 3, Good Health and Wellbeing, coming out as the most widely referenced in both our taught courses and peer reviewed papers.