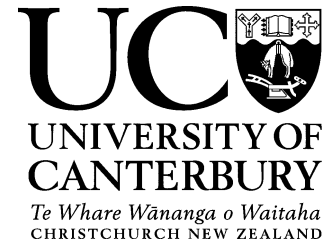


Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council



September 2025

Introduction

On 26 August UC held the annual Spring Graduation ceremonies. Together with the April graduation ceremonies, for 2025 a total of 3799 UC students have celebrated the completion of their qualifications.

At the THE Campus Live event hosted at UC, Minister Shane Reti delivered the keynote address. He announced five Ministerial initiatives: a new draft Tertiary Education Strategy (TES); the establishment of a University Strategy Group; a new Tertiary Education Research Fund to replace the PBRF; a review of the regulatory framework for university quality assurance, and strengthening institutional and academic governance.

Following exploratory discussions, the Vice-Chancellors and Chief Executives of Public Research Organisations signed a Statement of Collaboration on a joint work programme that will be delivered through Science New Zealand and Universities New Zealand.

Engagement

UC welcomed more than 180 delegates from across Australia and New Zealand for THE Campus Live ANZ 2025 during 2-3 September. This event is the region's leading forum for higher education leaders, industry, and policy experts to discuss the latest challenges and opportunities in the sector and it was the first time it was hosted in New Zealand. After Minister Reti's address there was a session with Vice-Chancellors moderated by THE Editor John Ross.

Around the same time, UC and Lincoln University co-hosted the annual Heads of Student Administration (HoSA) Conference at Rydges Hotel, Latimer Square. This year's theme, *Breaking Barriers: Fostering Equity, Diversity and Inclusion*, brought together 160 delegates from across New Zealand Australia.

As a result of UC's events, local hospitality venues benefitted with many restaurants being fully booked and several delegates extended their stay in Christchurch, generating additional flow-on benefits for the local economy.

UC also hosted the 13th International Geographic Information Science (GIS) conference in Christchurch during 26-29 August, attracting academics and industry from around the world. Engineering Associate Dean Research, Professor Geoff Rodgers, officially opened the conference on behalf of the University.

The annual WORD Christchurch Festival took place during 27-31 August and featured around 40 UC academics, students and alumni across various talks, panels and performances. On 29 August the

University hosted a reception to celebrate the success of UC creative writing programmes and alumni over the years, and featured readings from 2025 Ursula Bethell creative writing fellows Robyn Maree Pickens and Sarah Quigley.

UC Open Day took place on Friday 5 September and presented opportunities for future students and their whānau to experience UC. More than 7,000 prospective students and whānau registered to visit campus (up 7% compared to last year), our highest number to date, highlighting the continued attractiveness of both the University and the region. A record number of attendees took part in course sessions, asked questions, connected with student advisors, and joined campus activities designed to familiarise them with life at UC. The UC Open Day was profiled by both TVNZ and The Press.

The Canterbury West Coast Secondary Principals' Association meeting was hosted at the Dovedale campus on 12 September, attended by over 30 principals from secondary schools across Canterbury and the West Coast. Along with Education Executive Dean Professor Joce Nuttall and Director of Recruitment Ryan Thomas, I attended part of the event and delivered a presentation titled *From School to University: The Use of Data-led Approaches*. Professor Kevin Watson led an optional tour of Kōawa Studios.

UC hosted Raising the Bar for the third consecutive year on 16 September. Raising the Bar is an international initiative that began in New York in 2014, with the aim to make knowledge more accessible and spark engaging conversations between academics and the public in the relaxed setting of local bars. We hosted 20 talks by UC academics in 10 bars across the city.

Education – Accessible, Flexible Future Focussed

In term 4 UC will welcome a further 13 Erskine Fellows. We have one more Fellow arriving for Summer School, totalling 70 Erskine Fellows for the year. This year the Erskine programme will also have supported 22 UC staff on Erskine Grants to develop their teaching practices over the year.

The student success team have been working on the 2026 edition of Takatū, an online tool for first year students. This tool contains a range of information delivered in a student friendly format, which helps to demystify our processes, expectations, and support services. The 2026 edition will be ready for deployment in October.

In August students from Science (DRRE403) and Arts (COMS332) undertook a full day simulation of an emergency response to an offshore earthquake at the Canterbury Emergency Operations Centre at the Justice and Emergency Management Precinct. The scenario was a magnitude 9.3 earthquake off the coast of Peru triggering a 13-hour tsunami arrival threat for New Zealand. Students assumed roles of media, NEMA, Geonet, Canterbury Civil Defence and Emergency Management Group, Christchurch City Council Emergency Management, Lifeline groups, Police and Primary Industries. This exercise was carried out in partnership with the Canterbury Civil Defence and Emergency Management Group, Christchurch City Council and NEMA.

Research – Impact on a Changing World

Three Minute Thesis (3MT) is an international research communication competition that challenges students to present their research in just three minutes, using a single static slide, and in language accessible to a non-specialist audience. At UC, more than 100 doctoral students took part in this year's competition, with the top 14 finalists presenting at the Research Student Showcase. First place was awarded Lauren Hitt (Biological Sciences) for *The Diary of Kōaro, a Native Fish*. The runner up was Jess Love (Education) with *My Voice Matters*. Third place (and the People's Choice award) went to Muhammad Luqman (Civil & Environmental Engineering) for *Turning Dairy Waste into Fertilizer: The Magic of Purple Bacteria*.

UC has established New Zealand's first dedicated Autism Research Centre (ARC). Hosted at UC, the ARC is a cross-institutional collaboration that includes researchers from around the country and is supported by the Autistic Partnership-Aotearoa New Zealand (AP-NZ). Directed by Professor Laurie McLay from UC's Faculty of Health, the Centre held its first major event on 1 September, a symposium that brought together speakers from Australia and New Zealand, including researchers from the University of Otago, Victoria University of Wellington, and Auckland University of Technology.

Professor Ren Dobson (School of Biological Sciences) has been awarded \$9.6 million in the 2025 MBIE Endeavour Fund round for his project *Capillary devices for on-site diagnostics in diverse settings*, one of 19 funded projects (success rate of 12.3%).

UC researchers are involved in seven of the other Endeavour funded projects hosted at the University of Auckland, and the New Zealand Earth Sciences Institute (GNS; NIWA), generating \$4.35 million in revenue to UC through their involvement in these projects.

Professor Brigid McNeill, Dean of Postgraduate Research, presented a staff workshop entitled *New Supervisor Induction: Research Student Milestones and Processes*. It provided the key requirements for students and supervisors, and support available through Te Kura Tāura | UC Graduate School.

People – Nurturing Staff, Thriving Students

The UCSA ran a number of events for the first week of Term 4 – a start of term barbeque, a burger n bevvy night, and nights hosting a quiz, a karaoke competition and a games event.

The Health Centre and the Student Care team delivered a workshop in August to introduce international students to the New Zealand healthcare system and the Te Whare Tapa Whā model of wellbeing, helping them engage with local services.

UC won two awards at the recent Business Continuity Institute (BCI) Asia-Pacific Awards. Both wins – Collaboration in Resilience, and Most Original Exercise Programme – were as a result of the multi-organisation emergency preparedness exercise that UC hosted and helped organise at the start of 2025.

UC hosted the South Island launch of the AI in Health Research Network (AIHRN), with a number of staff attending. AIHRN aims to bring together researchers, clinicians, industry, and policymakers to explore the future of AI in health.

Our Employee Assistance Provider, Telus Health, ran a workshop entitled *How to have a Mental Health Conversation*, and another one called *Leadership Support – Burnout, Fatigue and Self-Care*. Haere Roa and St John also held a workshop on Mental Health First Aid.

The Student Care team partnered with the Faculty of Science to deliver training aimed to equip staff with strategies to feel confident identifying symptoms of students in distress, respond appropriately and refer to the appropriate service on campus. This will be replicated elsewhere.

Recent leadership development opportunities included a workshop entitled *Authentic Leadership, Leading to Achieve Goals* and *Building Psychologically Safe Teams*. A series of Employment New Zealand modules provided training for managers on employers' core rights and responsibilities.

During 14-20 September UC celebrated Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori with daily karakia workshops and other activities offered in Puaka-James Hight. Daily challenges were also available, such as online quizzes and prizes, practicing a Māori kīwhaha each day and engagement via social media.

Health and Safety

With Health and Safety reporting being encouraged across the University, the Chemical and Process Engineering department prompted its students who contributed about fifty percent of the Health and Safety reports this month, mostly about safe practices or ideas for safety in laboratory spaces.

Recent communications to students have emphasised the requirement for cyclists to wear helmets, after an increase in reports.

Contractors working in the University boiler house accidentally disturbed asbestos insulation in one of the boilers. The Facilities Management team responded quickly, the area was isolated, a clean-up undertaken by a specialist removalist, and follow up conducted with the contractor.

Internationalisation – Locally Engaged, Globally Networked

The UC Business School was awarded Business School of the Year at the 2025 PIEoneer Awards in London on 5 September. Presented by UK-based global platform The PIE (Professionals in International Education), the awards recognise excellence in the international education sector and award institutions that are shaping the future of education worldwide. It was the only Australasian finalist and the first New Zealand business school to win the award, recognising innovation and excellence in international education through initiatives such as the culturally focused Tūhono programme and globally oriented Industry Project.

Kien Ngo, one of our outstanding Vietnamese Bachelor of Commerce students, was named the Mayor's International Student of the Year at the Waitaha Canterbury International Student Awards. These awards celebrate the remarkable contributions international students make to the social, cultural, and economic life of the Canterbury region. Another student making a difference in the community is Katherine Gee, whose MBA project connects former refugees with local volunteers to help build social networks and employment opportunities. The project is being piloted by one of the local secondary schools.

On 1 September the Faculty of Engineering welcomed 21 high-achieving international students to campus for the first September delivery of our accelerated Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) programme. Designed for top STEM students transitioning directly from high school, this pathway allows them to complete a compressed, modified first year in just six months, before commencing their second year in February 2026.

Organisational Efficacy

The UC Mobile app launched three key features to improve student experience: an in-app calendar, enhanced campus maps with location-linked events, and integrated student notices from our website. Over 12,000 students have now downloaded and actively use the app daily.

For the second consecutive year, UC's Digital team was recognised for excellence at the Tertiary ICT Awards. Jamie Hart, Paul Arnold and Francois Bissey represented UC at the 2025 conference in Auckland 9-11 September, where our team was named as the Supreme Award Winner for the UC Research Hub implementation which was part of the Cloud Enablement programme. The judges were particularly impressed by the team's strong stakeholder engagement, the provision of a holistic solution that transforms how e-research will work in the future, and the utilisation of the University cloud transformation programme.

Following the completion of the Karl Popper building refurbishment, the Faculty of Law have relocated to their new location.

Environmentally Sustainable

The first transdisciplinary team relating to energy and the energy transition at UC has been established. The team includes the EPEC Centre and colleagues from Arts, Law, Science and Business, who will work together to address the techno-socio-economic challenges that are becoming a major factor in unlocking our decarbonised future.

UC won a funding grant from the Canterbury Waste Minimisation Grant to support a project on reducing 3D printing waste. The grant will enable us to progress our waste reduction initiatives, with reporting milestones set for early and mid-2026 to share our outcomes and learnings.