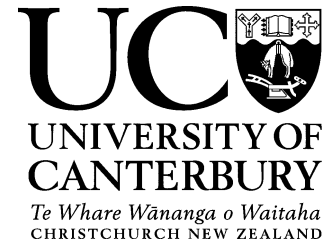


# Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council



**May 2025**

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## Introduction

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The government announced its 2025 Budget on 22 May. Unlike previous years there is no core increase in subsidy funding; instead there is categorization into priority areas with increased funding by either 0.9% for priority or decreased by 3.7% for non-priority areas.

As part of ongoing science reforms, the government announced that three new public research organisations will be established from 1 July. The New Zealand Institute for Bioeconomy Science, New Zealand Institute for Earth Science, and the New Zealand Institute for Public Health and Forensic Science will focus on delivering innovation and support for industries to strengthen the economy and boost national resilience.

Dr Alan Bollard CNZM and Mr Robin Hapi CNZM were appointed as Chair and as Deputy Chair of the Board of the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). They joined the TEC board earlier this year and their appointments are until 31 October 2027.

The King's Birthday Honours list was announced on 2 June. We were proud of our many UC alumni who were recognised for their outstanding contributions to a wide range of sports and services – cricket, swimming, cycling, business, fire safety technology, the community, filmmaking, governance, music, engineering, arts, history, Māori health, education, astronomy. Mr Alan Gilmore and Ms Pamela Kilmartin, observers and technicians at the Mt John Observatory from 1980 to 2014, were recognised for their contributions to furthering astronomy in New Zealand by being made members of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the King's Birthday Honours 2025. Alan holds an adjunct appointment in the School of Physical and Chemical Sciences.

## Engagement

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Celebrating our city's exceptional architecture and design, UC joined 51 sites for Open Christchurch during 3-4 May. College House offered pre-booked tours, while Puaka-James Hight Library, Beatrice Tinsley, and Ernest Rutherford buildings opened to the public on 4 May. The Macmillan Brown Library hosted two special archive sessions with Professor Ian Lochhead and archivist Erin Kimber. The event offers visitors to campus a unique opportunity to experience the University's blend of historic and contemporary design from within.

On 13 May UC hosted the annual STEM Careers Fair attracting nearly 2,000 students – up 20% from 2024. With 86 employer booths, the Fair was a vibrant showcase of UC's local and national industry connections.

On 15 May there was an informal alumni gathering in Oxford at Jericho Coffee, owned by UC alumnus James Armitage. Special guests included UK Trust Board Chair Alene Wilton and trustees Jeremy Wilson and Stuart Harray.

On 24 May the Advancement Team hosted the first of two 2025 trips to Mt John Observatory to engage alumni and donors, strengthen their connections with the University, and showcase UC's astronomy research.

Following its inaugural meeting on 28 May, we announced our new Digital Screen Kōawa Studios Industry Advisory Board. The Board's role will be pivotal in ensuring UC's offerings are future focused, industry-connected, and globally relevant, as well as supporting the growth of Kōawa Studios. Chaired by Ingrid Taylor, a Christchurch-based commercial property lawyer with extensive governance experience, Board members include award-winning film director Michelle Walshe, Whitebait Media founder Janine Morrell-Gunn ONZM, media-tech entrepreneur and Emmy judge Catherine Warren, creative technologist Nikora Ngaropo, among leaders from ChristchurchNZ and the global screen and technology sectors. Media and industry releases were picked up by Inside Film (international coverage), Showtools, Inside Government and ED Insider, and shared on Kōawa Studio's LinkedIn and the UC website.

Also on 28 May Southbase and UC hosted Minister for Building and Construction, Chris Penk, and MP for Ilam Hamish Campbell for a site visit of Tupuārangi, UC's new accommodation facility. In the evening Canterbury University Press launched Gabrielle Huria's debut poetry collection Pakiaka at the Canterbury Club.

Six of the eleven New Zealanders recognised in the 2025 Forbes 30 under 30 Asia list released in May are UC alumni, capturing 54% of New Zealand's representation.

In the lead-up to Matariki, the University marked the occasion with a post on its official LinkedIn channel, highlighting the significance of Matariki and its meaning within the context of Te Wai Pounamu and Ngāi Tahu. The content acknowledged the cultural and seasonal importance of the celebration and reflected the University's values of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and tiakitanga.

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

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With exams approaching, May was a month with many assessments and projects for students. For instance, the HIT Lab NZ MHIT students presented prototypes developed during a 3-week project, supervised by Dr Donald Degraen and Associate Professor Heide Lukosch. The students worked with the International Antarctic Centre on interactive visitor experiences, improving the visitor flow and education on climate change in playful ways.

Between finalising assessments and preparing for exams, the library was well used and although the numbers were reportedly high, additional configurations and opening of spaces not typically used for study meant that the numbers were manageable. UC students and staff are continuing to work together to create a wider variety of study spaces for students. Online students are also making great use of the library from a distance. The subject librarian in Health Sciences has been particularly busy supporting students with the expansion of nursing and counselling delivered through UCOOnline.

There continues to be interest in artificial intelligence and curriculum. Trends for Generative AI within the context of Work-Integrated Learning was the topic of conversation for the Professional and Community Engagement (PACE) Programme-led networking event on 22 May. The event was held at Business Canterbury, with 62 delegates from 44 PACE community and industry organisations in attendance. Participants enjoyed the opportunity that PACE provided them to compare notes on how the next generation are using AI as a tool in the workplace.

In another excellent collaboration, Professor Ben Kennedy and Doctors Rob Cruickshank and Sara Kross were awarded \$300,000 over three years by the Tait foundation for their Scientists in Schools program to train UC students in science communication, science teaching and work ready skills whilst working with local year 9 and 10 science teachers and their classes to develop and deliver authentic science experiences. UC students can take this course through the PACE program and receive science credits for the course. Professor Kennedy is collaborating with Children's University to help coordinate and run the course.

Finally, curriculum development continues with the CUAP proposals being reviewed for the second round. At UC, 37 staff across faculties are peer-reviewing the proposals received from other universities. UC's proposal to shift the Certificate of Foundation Studies to an onshore programme focused on international students was recently approved. This will provide excellent transition support to international students coming to UC.

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

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We have retained our ranking of 261 on the QS World Rankings. This is up one place in New Zealand to 5th, and we remain in the top 18% of ranked institutions (8,467 across 106 countries). Within New Zealand we are second highest ranked for employment outcomes and sustainability, 3rd for employer reputation and international faculty, 4th for academic reputation, 5th for international research network, 6th for citations per faculty, 7th for international students and lowest for faculty student ratio. Work is underway to implement measures to increase performance on all measures.

School of Biological Sciences PhD candidate and recipient of a UC Doctoral Scholarship, Daniel Hernandez-Carrasco, along with his supervisors, Associate Professor and Rutherford Discovery Fellow Jonathan Tonkin and Professor Jason Tylianakis, had a paper published in the prestigious journal, *Science*, *Ecological and evolutionary consequences of changing seasonality*. The research explored the disruptive consequences of climate change on of Earth's seasons and impact on biodiversity.

Associate Professor David Monger received an award from the United States' National WW1 Museum's inaugural Writing Prize 'for a non-fiction article on the Great War and its enduring impact on the global community' for his article *A 'not uncongenial task': British propaganda veterans and propaganda's post-First World War reputation*, published in *First World War Studies* in 2022.

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

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UC and the UCSA worked together on a Harmful Sexual Behaviour Prevention campaign. Part of this was a video quiz on UCSA social media. 1,000 students answered each question and 3,600 students viewed Instagram stories. The quiz was also shown on digital screens inside Ilam Campus buildings.

Other promotions for students in Semester One have been a flatting and wellbeing workshop, a kai and kōrero event for adult students, an Indian Spices workshop for students wanting to learn from international colleagues, and a blood drive run by the NZ Blood Services. The Wellbeing Navigators have run a programme of drop in events. Wellbeing Navigators are UC students trained to offer peer support and help connect students with the right services.

The 2025 National Tertiary Sports Championship Series is underway, with UC as the defending champion. The first event was rowing where UC was a close second.

The 2025 student international ambassador programme is underway. The students involved come from a range of halls and have joined the programme to lead the development of events that build a sense of community among international students living in student accommodation.

A new video developed by the Student Accommodation Services team on the application process for domestic students is now live.

Staff have been offered a range of programmes or workshops over the past month, including *Retirement – Planning to Retire in the Next Few Years*, and *Taking Charge of Your Financial Wellbeing*. The online workshop *LGBTQIA+ and Ally Awareness* introduced participants to acronyms and their meanings, unconscious biases and how to be an ally to work colleagues. A local law firm has run a staff workshop on Wills. UC Leaders were offered workshops entitled *Decision Making*, *Supporting Staff Mental Wellbeing*, *Leading Change*, *The Influential Leader*, and *Fostering and Embedding A Growth Mindset* and academic staff have been able to attend events on Early Career Academic Interdisciplinary Networking and The Academic Promotions Process for Applicants.

Pink Shirt Day was observed by a number of departments on 16 May, as part of a programme to raise awareness about eliminating bullying and celebrating inclusion and diversity.

On 3 June the Canterbury University Samoan Students' Association hosted the Ava Ceremony in the Puaka James Hight library to launch Samoan Language Week at UC. Following the ceremony attendees connected over light refreshments.

## **Health and Safety**

Among the issues were:

- Seven slips, trips and falls have occurred on campus, with no or first aid only injuries. There is a campus maintenance programme that aims to mitigate these risks, and a "Think First" safety campaign.
- The ongoing response to disproportionate levels of corrosion in the Ernest Rutherford building plant room. The most likely cause has been identified as the permeable design of the ducting connectors. Air testing has confirmed no risk to the building occupants.
- A successful programme has been implemented to dispose of legacy waste in laboratories and storage facilities in the Faculty of Science.
- A student was taken to hospital after an allergic reaction to a catered lunch. The Health and Safety team is implementing a programme for approval of food safety plans, which mitigates this risk.

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

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On 16 May I hosted His Excellency Sakias Tameo, High Commissioner of Papua New Guinea to New Zealand during his first visit to Christchurch. The visit included discussions around UC's work developing the Pacific Security Hub (PSH), and PNG's important role in this. HE Tameo highlighted a need for capacity building across PNG institutions and requested UC's support.

Also on 16 May UC announced its first officially recognised joint education programme with Qufu Normal University (QFNU), approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education under its prestigious Sino-Foreign Cooperative Education (SFCE) scheme. Over two years in the making and launching in September 2025, the agreement represents a major milestone in UC's internationalisation strategy and our first formal education partnership of this kind in China.

Three agreements have been signed between Latin American entities (LATAM) Universities New Zealand on behalf of the 8 universities. These agreements have developed after the visit from UNZ (including Rebecca Hurrell from UC) to Latin America last year:

- BECAL – a Paraguayan scholarship funding agency, for the establishment of a scholarship program.
- CONACYT – a Mexican scholarship funding agency, for the establishment of a scholarship program.
- USFQ – Universidad San Francisco de Quito - we are working on a joint virtual research symposium with them to be held in July/August.

During 6-14 May Professor Joce Nuttall, Executive Dean of Education, and Professor Christoph Teschers, travelled to Germany and Czech Republic to progress Horizon Europe collaborative research planning with Bielefeld University and engage with the NEOLAIa European Universities Alliance. The work strengthens UC's international footprint in education research and builds a deeper connection into Horizon funding through European partners.

UC has finalised a collaboration proposal with the South African Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority (CHIETA) and Sasol Ltd. The proposed Accelerated Renewable Energy Upskilling Programme aims to bridge the skills gap in South Africa's chemical and energy sector. This work focusses on a 3-month professional development programme delivered by UC to offer industry professionals a Postgraduate Certificate or a Certificate of Proficiency in the area of renewable energy engineering.

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

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On 29 May the 2024 Annual Report was published to the University website, including key highlights from the year.

Digital have successfully deployed Cogniti in pilot at UC. Cogniti is a generative AI tool developed at the University of Sydney, powered by GPT-4, designed to augment human intelligence and support teaching and learning. It allows educators to create custom chatbot agents and load resources to enhance student learning experiences. The pilot currently involves 40 academics across multiple disciplines, providing insights into how Cogniti's capabilities can enhance literature reviews, grant writing, and course planning. Initial feedback has been positive, and we're gathering data to inform broader rollout recommendations.

Our new UC Research Compute Hub (UC RCH) is live. It replaces our end-of-life Research Compute Cluster and offers varied workload management, increased data security, robust disaster recovery and easier ways for researchers to collaborate for researchers across departments and institutions. Our Physics and Maths departments have commenced using nodes on the UC RCH for both research and teaching projects.

The new Kōawa website went live in May. The Kōawa Studios and Digital Screen Production and Post-Production building is on schedule; forecast practical completion is scheduled for December 2025. The Jack Mann theatre construction is nearing completion, to be handed over by the contractor on 7 July for technology fit out (projectors and sound system) and the theatre will be available for use in Semester 2 this year.

## **Environmentally Sustainable**

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The Times Higher Education Impact rankings were publicly released on 18 June. The rankings measure university progress and achievements against all 17 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), on a mix of publication and evidence basis.

The overall global rank of the University has risen 28 places since the 2023 results, and we are now =61 in the world. We have also risen to second in New Zealand (after Auckland), and in SDGs 11,12 and 14 we are now ranked first in NZ.

The boiler conversion projects and the project to install the ground source heat pump outside Science are drawing to a close, with final contractor closure, and just minor financial adjustments being made by the quantity surveyor. The project has come in on budget.