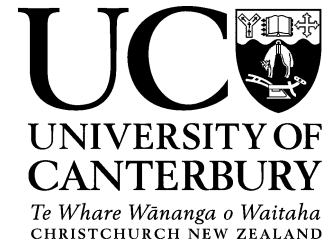


Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council



August 2026

Introduction

The second semester started well with the campus busy as students returned to classes. We also welcomed 33 leading academics as part of the Erksine Fellowship programme. The Erksine Fellows will be teaching across a range of faculties, providing our students with global perspectives on a range of topics.

Semester 2 enrolments reached a new record for UC, with growth in both domestic and international enrolments. Overall, international new-to-UC enrolments are tracking approximately 36% ahead of the same time last year, measured in EFTS. On 8 July UC hosted its largest second semester international student welcome ever. The increased international enrolments were reflected in strong uptake of orientation activities and information sessions, aimed to embed our international students into UC's student-centred learning and campus culture.

Lectures for Semester 2 will conclude on 21 August, followed by graduations on 25-26 August.

Engagement

UC's contribution to major events and public engagement received national recognition in August, when the Adaptation Futures 2025 event was named Business Event of the Year at the New Zealand Events Awards. Co-hosted by UC, the flagship event of the World Adaptation Science Programme brought nearly 2,000 global delegates to Christchurch, making it the largest climate adaptation event hosted in New Zealand. UC's leadership and expertise were prominent throughout, from the opening event through to a number of panels and presentations.

During 23-24 June, 433 students from 17 schools participated in the Children's University Campus Experience, delivered in partnership with Lincoln University. The programme encourages tamariki aged 7-14 to pursue engaging learning experiences outside the classroom. At UC, they explored a range of subjects and met volcanologists, engineers, chemists, glaciologists and many others.

The annual Volunteering Expo on 4 August extended this focus on learning through experience, connecting students with 28 not-for-profit organisations across Waitaha Canterbury. By contributing to their communities and stepping into new experiences, students can connect their learning with real world challenges and recognise the knowledge, skills and perspectives they are developing.

Pathways into future study and work was the focus of STEMinism, hosted on campus on 25 June, where young women in Years 11-13 and their whānau were encouraged to consider engineering study. The event attracted 110 people in person and online, with 97.4% of survey respondents rating it positively and staff rating it 9.6/10 on average.

UC's first cohort of Postgraduate Diploma in Psychology Assistance students also came together on campus on 24 July for their first in-person learning since beginning their studies at the start of Semester 2. Minister for Mental Health Hon Matt Doocey visited UC to meet and speak with the students.

At the Great Hall on 7 July, *UC Presents: Under One Sky - Matariki Across Cultures* brought together experts from Māori and Indigenous Studies, languages, history and classics to explore how different cultures understand and celebrate the star cluster known in Aotearoa as Matariki. Professor Te Maire Tau, Associate Professor Peter Field, Dr Susan Bouterey and Associate Professor Enrica Sciarrino helped engage the wider community in conversations about shared human traditions.

The UC-led immersive installation *Desiderium: What Stood Here* won the Best New Zealand Immersive Impact Project Award at Doc Edge on 1 July. Led by School of Creative and Digital Arts Lecturer Ellie Adams, the work recreates the ancient forests that once covered Banks Peninsula and invites visitors into a long-lost landscape. It was also shown in Christchurch as part of the Doc Edge Festival's free three-day event at UC's Jack Mann Theatre during 31 July - 2 August, presented in partnership with Kōawa Studios and co-sponsored by Screen Canterbury.

On 11 July the UC Business School signed a five-year Memorandum of Understanding with Nelson AI Sandbox (NAIS), a Nelson-based charitable trust that has helped more than 25,000 people build AI confidence through free community workshops and drop-in support since launching two years ago. Building on a student project and short-course collaboration already under way, the agreement creates opportunities for joint research, student and staff involvement in AI-related projects, and new short courses and learning pathways. It reflects a shared values-based commitment to helping more people across Nelson and Canterbury build the capability to thrive in an AI-centric world.

The Faculty of Law hosted its annual Town and Gown midwinter gathering on 7 August. Attendees included members of the judiciary, representatives and leaders from the local Law industry and alumni. The event also celebrated the 50-year career of Emeritus Professor Philip Joseph, KC.

Education – Accessible, Flexible Future Focussed

The second half of the year is often a time where industry engagement and employability is top of mind for many students. Across UC, there have been a range of activities building connection opportunities for students. The Centre for Employability and Career Development hosted UC's inaugural Government Careers Day on 24 July, bringing together central and local government agencies, including the Ministry for Primary Industries, Christchurch City Council and the Department of Corrections. 200 students across Arts, Law, Business, Psychology and Community Youth Leadership attended, with engagement quality exceeding expectations. All participating employers indicated they would return, and academic leaders from Arts, Law and Psychology identified opportunities to deepen curriculum-industry connections. Specific faculty and department events also provided excellent opportunities for students.

The Department of Computer Science and Software Engineering (CSSE) offered a range of events for students. One example was the 2026 Mid-Year Talent Sprint, connecting 51 students with 24 industry professionals from 12 organisations through more than 230 rapid interviews. The event strengthened industry partnerships while creating valuable pathways to internships, graduate employment and work-integrated learning opportunities, further enhancing student employability.

Preparing students for work by building AI skills into the curriculum has also been a feature of the past period. Again, CSSE were highly involved with industry, partnering with Software Innovation NZ (SINZ) to host an industry forum exploring the impact of AI on software development and Computer Science education. Researchers and industry leaders discussed emerging workforce needs, future research opportunities and curriculum development. The UC Business School has also progressed a strategic AI transformation to prepare students for AI-enabled workplaces and equip staff with AI capability.

Accessible and flexible education continues to be delivered at UC with an uplift in UC Online programmes. The newly introduced Master of Applied AI has been popular with approximately 40

enrolments in its first opening. UC Online, partnering with Professor Gail Gillon and the Child Well-Being Institute, were awarded 8 short online professional development courses for Learning Support Coordinators across New Zealand.

In Engineering, Dr Daniel van der Walt, Rodney Young, Lulu Barry and the UC Online team received a national Risk NZ Award of Excellence for Networking and Partnership in Risk Management at the RiskNZ Awards of Excellence on 22 July. The national award recognises the outstanding collaboration and impact behind the development of the UC Enterprise Risk Management Master's courses, which combine academic excellence with industry expertise to prepare the next generation of risk professionals.

Student success initiatives such as Kia Angitu and He Kokonga have continued to progress. The Peer Assisted Learning Support (PALS) programme continues to provide impactful outcomes for students, with those who attend as few as 2 sessions performing at least 1 grade point average above their matched-pair peers. The 2 scholarship programmes, Takere and Te Kakau a Māui, have both shown positive outcomes for the students who commenced Semester 1, 2026.

Research – Impact on a Changing World

The Government announced a revised National Intellectual Property Management Policy effective 1 July 2026, alongside new commercialisation guidelines and funding support. The updated policy provides greater clarity on IP ownership, benefit-sharing and the roles of researchers and institutions, underpinned by principles addressing good-faith negotiation, national benefit and Māori interests.

Four UC researchers and innovators were selected as finalists for the 2026 KiwiNet Research Commercialisation Awards, which recognise research being transformed into new ventures, emerging industries, and lasting economic and societal benefit. The UC finalists are Professor Matthew Watson (*Driving new industries for a lower-emissions future*), Dr Jake Campbell (*Making insulin drug delivery work for real life*), Zac Hemmings (*Turning household clutter into a business opportunity*), and Mark Campbell (*A bright idea protecting those with light-sensitive conditions*).

The Coalition for Books has named Dr Madi Williams as one of its 2026 New Voices of Aotearoa, an annual initiative that highlights distinctive emerging New Zealand writers across fiction, poetry and non-fiction. The programme is designed to connect readers with authors who have already demonstrated early critical and commercial success, and to raise the profile of New Zealand books. The 2026 list was selected by an expert judging panel and includes 8 writers identified as shaping the future of New Zealand literature.

The National Geographic documentary, *Secrets of the Penguins*, was awarded 2 Emmy Awards for Outstanding Nature Documentary and Outstanding Cinematography for the episode *Heart of the Emperors*. Professor Michelle LaRue served as Science Consultant for this episode.

UC Researchers Dr Felipe Kuncar, Professor Brendon Bradley, Dr Robin Lee and collaborators received the 2025 Earthquake Spectra Outstanding Paper Award for their article *Methods to account for shallow site effects in hybrid broadband ground-motion simulations*. This award is the highest honour from the earthquake engineering field's premier international journal.

Associate Professor Matthew Hobbs was awarded the 2026 Australasian Epidemiological Association Mid-Career Professional Development Award.

UC engineering students Derek Dossmann and Emmanuel Bourgeois are investigating the use of coral sand as a low-cost material for household water filters in Tonga. The research had gained the attention of the Tongan Ministry of Education and Tonga Health Promotion Foundation, with a pilot project now underway in 9 Tongan schools.

People – Nurturing Staff, Thriving Students

A Start of Semester 2 communication campaign helped support students to transition into the second half of the academic year. It provided new and returning students with the information and resources needed to successfully begin university or reset for the new semester, and promoted UC's academic, wellbeing and pastoral support services. It reminded students of the standards outlined in the Student Code of Conduct and promoted a safe, respectful and inclusive campus environment. It also encouraged participation in campus activities, events and student communities. The campaign was also an opportunity to remind students about what support tools are available on campus for their health and safety, and to encourage proactive reporting of any incidents with Assura.

The UCSA hosted a successful series of Re Ori 2026 Festival events throughout July. These included a welcome event, quiz night, an International Student Mayoral Welcome, a Gaming Expo, themed evening musical events, and a Winter Wellness Expo.

Flu Vaccines remain available and fully subsidised for students and staff.

A Leadership Webinar series has been designed for aspiring University leaders. The July workshop was entitled *What Science Tells Us About How to Motivate Ourselves and Othersd*.

64 staff from a range of faculties and service units have participated in a Project and Change Management coaching programme. This focusses on current work projects and supports participants to apply practical approaches that address real organisational challenges, improve delivery outcomes, and consider the needs of those affected by change.

Health and Safety

On 30 July the Health and Safety at Work (Hazardous Substances) Amendment Regulations 2026 came into force. They are designed to ease compliance burdens for teaching, research, and testing laboratories. The main changes are:

- Recognition that these laboratories operate on a smaller scale, and generally have a larger range but smaller quantities of chemicals than industrial chemical manufacturing laboratories;
- Risk Management plans should be tailored to specific risks, rather than a one-size-fits-all industrial laboratory plan;
- Chemical storerooms will have the same rules as the laboratories they service.

An Approved Code of Practice to support the amended regulations is currently being codesigned with the Science Sector, with publication likely to take 12-18 months.

Internationalisation – Locally Engaged, Globally Networked

On 7 August the school of Civil Engineering hosted a South Korean delegation to showcase UC's internationally recognised research and expertise in earthquake engineering, resilient infrastructure, and disaster recovery, including lessons learned from the 2010-2011 Canterbury earthquakes and Christchurch's ongoing revitalisation. UC's innovative research facilities were showcased, and opportunities for collaboration were explored. Attendees included members of the Korea National Assembly, the Korea Society of Civil Engineers, and a representative from the Korean Embassy in New Zealand.

The Faculty of Education is one of only three recipients of the 2026 New Zealand–China Tripartite Partnership Fund awards. The funded project, delivered in collaboration with Shanghai Normal University and Qufu Normal University, will focus on digital leadership in early childhood education. Of particular significance is the involvement of two of the University's transnational education (TNE) partners, strengthening the integration of research and teaching within these strategic international partnerships.

Dr Serena Kelly, UC Senior Lecturer Above the Bar in Political Science and International Relations, has been elected Chair of the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs (NZIIA) for the 2026–27 term. Dr Kelly previously served as Vice Chair and as Chair of the Institute’s Christchurch Branch. The NZIIA is New Zealand’s leading public organisation for the discussion of international affairs and has a long-standing reputation for fostering informed dialogue on issues shaping New Zealand’s engagement with the global community.

Professor Gail Gillon has been appointed New Zealand’s Permanent Representative to UNESCO as the Asia-Pacific representative on the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report Advisory Board for a two-year term. The Advisory Board provides strategic guidance to UNESCO’s flagship education monitoring programme and brings together representatives from the United Nations, national governments, civil society organisations, and internationally recognised education experts. Professor Gillon’s appointment reflects the international standing of her expertise and contribution to the education sector.

On July 1 UC held an event at the New Zealand High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The event was hosted by His Excellency, the New Zealand High Commissioner, Mike Walsh and by Executive Dean Engineering Professor Saurabh Sinha, and was supported by Global Engagement and UC Advancement. The event was an opportunity to celebrate the success of UC’s large alumni community in Malaysia, many of whom are senior industry or government leaders. Smaller alumni and stakeholder events were also hosted in Sibuluan and Kuching, where UC has robust and highly engaged alumni communities.

On 6 July, the delegation led by Professor Sinha completed a programme of engagements in Malaysia associated with international teaching, research and partnership activities. Across the visit, members of the delegation and the wider UC team engaged with a range of industry, government, university, alumni and other stakeholders.

Starting from 19 July, UC is hosting 6 students from Wuhan Sports University, supported by the UC Recreation Centre. In addition to general English learning and global competency training, the students will experience the best cultural and sporting experiences that Christchurch has to offer.

Organisational Efficacy – of a sustainable scale by 2030

Three significant releases were delivered through UC Mobile this quarter: Course Information - providing access to course details, upcoming classes and course progression information; Personalisation - enabling students to customise their experience around frequently used features; and the Student Employability Survey helping students assess career readiness while providing valuable insights to support employability initiatives.

The new Student Hub (my.canterbury.ac.nz) went live in July for 2 UC Online programmes. The Hub provides a single-entry point across Ako|Learn and UCO Moodle, simplifying access to learning resources and establishing the foundation for a broader student portal experience. This new unified experience will now be progressively expanded to all students over the remainder of 2026.

During July 2026, coinciding with the start of Semester 2, Digital Services frontline teams in Te Pātaka delivered 678 walk-up support interactions for approximately 557 unique users, achieving a 98.7% resolution rate. Demand was consistent with the same period in 2025, highlighting the continued value of accessible, face-to-face support during a key stage of the student journey. Supported by UC student casual staff working alongside Digital Services team members, this service helped students quickly connect to WiFi, access Microsoft 365, complete MFA setup, activate accounts, and resolve personal device issues. This support enabled students to access learning resources, university systems and campus services, helping them engage confidently with their studies from the start of the semester.

Responding to the current and future growth of the Canterbury region and the University, UC Accommodation Services recently hosted the Ōtautahi Student Accommodation Forum. This event brought together over 90 stakeholders, including staff and students from all tertiary education providers, current and prospective private sector developers, owners and operators, property managers, and City Council elected representatives and planning managers. The Forum heard from a student panel, discussed the nature of future demand for student housing, examined a model developed in Australia for collaboration and quality assurance (Student Accommodation Association), and workshopped what would be required to achieve sustainable growth in the accommodation sector. This resulted in new connections and plans to continue to work together on a whole-of-sector approach to provision of accommodation for students across Christchurch.

Environmentally Sustainable

A multidisciplinary UC student team has begun laboratory testing to determine whether spent brewery grain can be converted into high-value nanocellulose using synthetic biology and engineering. Spent grain accounts for approximately 85% of brewing waste and can generate carbon emissions when sent to landfill. Nanocellulose has potential applications in packaging, cosmetics, electronics, wound care, and biodegradable materials. If successful, the Nanobrew project could transform a costly and highly perishable waste stream into a valuable low-carbon resource. This initiative advances UC's sustainability objectives through waste reduction, circular production, and bio-based material development, while providing students with practical experience in research-led innovation alongside industry and community partners.

The University recently announced 12 UC Connect Doctoral Scholarships for 2026, all focused on water and co-funded with external partners. The projects will address flood forecasting, groundwater contamination, microplastics, antimicrobial resistance, freshwater biodiversity, geothermal monitoring, water-intensive vineyard frost protection, and the atmospheric impacts of rocket emissions. This new research programme directly supports UC's commitment to sustainable futures by developing evidence-based approaches to water management, ecosystem protection, climate adaptation, and more efficient resource use. The partnership model will also strengthen UC's engagement with councils, government agencies, science organisations, and industry, while preparing emerging researchers to deliver practical solutions to significant environmental and community challenges.

UC researchers are currently using Christchurch's Red Zone as a living laboratory to test whether compost, biochar, sawdust, and native vegetation can stabilise heavy metals, build soil carbon, and restore contaminated urban land. Early findings indicate that locally sourced biowaste could provide a more affordable and lower-impact alternative to excavating contaminated soil and transporting it to landfill. The approach could also improve biodiversity, support productive land uses, and increase resilience to flooding, erosion, and drought. This research strongly aligns with UC's sustainability goals by combining waste reuse, carbon storage, ecological restoration and climate adaptation, with growing Council and international interest (including from Horizon Europe), highlighting its potential wider impact.