

Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council



June 2026

Introduction

The King's Birthday Honours list was released on 1 June. We are proud of the 18 [UC alumni](#) who were recognised for their services to health, education, sport, engineering, governance, community and youth, people with disabilities, business and music.

The Government released the 2026/27 budget on 28 May. Overall funding for both the tertiary education and science sectors was relatively flat. Whilst additional tertiary education places are being funded, it is still expected that actual 2027 enrolments, particularly at Universities, will exceed funded volumes in 2027. Per-student subsidy rates are also generally unchanged between 2026 and 2027.

The Minister for Tertiary Education has signalled a review beginning later in 2026 to consider, amongst other matters, whether the proportion of tertiary education funded by the student compared to the government should be changed.

Engagement

On 4 June UC hosted Te Rā Tūhura | Discovery Day on Ilam campus. The event attracted 2,000 Year 12 students from Christchurch High Schools to experience university life, explore different subject areas and learn more about the study pathways available. The event is an early step in shaping their future study plans.

NZ Story works with government agencies and exporters/industry to tell the story of NZ tech and innovation internationally. On 18 June, NZ Story featured three tech spin-offs that originated at UC. The companies were: Zethos, which has patented low cost and low carbon methods to extract zinc and other critical minerals from industrial waste streams; Swaltech, which helps people with dysphagia (swallowing difficulties) through world-first rehabilitation technology; and Zuuka, which has developed wearable insulin pump technology designed to make diabetes management simpler and more accessible. Content will be shared with NZ Inc colleagues, including High Commissions and Embassies in over 60 countries with over 140 social media accounts, as well as other partner organisations. UC created website stories to complement the project and engaged on social media.

The latest in the UC Business School's Thought Leadership Series, *Dyslexic Thinking: An Untapped Strategic Advantage for Modern Business?*, took place on 18 June. Dorenda Britten, Chris Cole, Graham Grant and Michelle Sharp were led in discussion by MBA Director Ekant Veer on how dyslexic thinking could unlock New Zealand's 30-year old productivity puzzle. The event attracted around 80 people.

On 23 June, UC hosted day one of Mātāpuna Mātātahi | Children's University's two-day Campus Experience event, welcoming more than 250 participants from eight schools. Tamariki took part in hands-on learning activities including chemistry experiments, volcano demonstrations, bug investigations using microscopes, earthquake engineering challenges, and building and testing marble runs. Day two of the Campus Experience will take place on 24 June.

UC's School of Music brought together students and staff for the World Drumming Festival, which was held in Christchurch on 30 May 2026. The event was sold out due to popularity.

Education – Accessible, Flexible Future Focussed

As Semester One nears conclusion, the examination period is underway. Student support is in high demand over the exam period, and the Student Care team drop-in service has been expanded to enable students who are seeking wellbeing support to engage with advisors without requiring an appointment. In addition, options for extended appointment times have been increased so students can take their time and maximise their experience with an advisor.

The Centre for Entrepreneurship (UCE) ran another successful 48 hour Disrupt Challenge in May. The Beyond Boundaries Challenge, delivered in partnership with 2degrees, was timed to discover potential use cases for the 2026 launch of 2degrees' satellite communications service. The students provided innovative ideas on how unlimited connectivity around New Zealand could benefit IoT, telemetry, data science and digital equity. There were 75 students from undergraduate to PhD level accepted for the Challenge, with a waitlist of another 12 students.

The end of semester provides an opportunity to evaluate the impact of student success initiatives. While final grades are not yet available, early indicators point to strong engagement and positive longer-term outcomes. Approximately one-third of first-year students have engaged with Kaitoko first-year advisors in 2026, demonstrating the reach of proactive support models. The number of students who participated in Peer Assisted Learning Support (PALS) continues to grow. In addition to ongoing improved completion rates for students who attend PALS, Semester 1 feedback from the UCSA student class representatives has reinforced the perceived benefit for students as well.

UC's commitment to accessible education is extending across borders through the IIT-Madras initiative, enabling Master of Applied Data Science students to begin their studies online. Two UC short courses were launched on the IITM-NPTEL platform, India's public education network, further expanding international access to UC education and strengthening the University's global reputation.

Research – Impact on a Changing World

The Science Investment Plan 2026–2036 was released, confirming a strategic shift to four priority pillars with increased emphasis on commercialisation, mission-led research, and consolidation of key funds, alongside significant reallocation of funding across the system. The plan signalled tighter expectations on research relevance and impact for New Zealand, and ongoing development of new funding mechanisms and system settings.

Research projects underway demonstrate UC's commitment to undertaking research with *Impact in a Changing World*:

Professor Kathryn MacCallum (School of Learning and Professional Practice) is leading work on the Scaffolded AI Literacy (SAIL) framework. SAIL supports learners and educators to understand artificial intelligence (AI) and to think critically about when, how and why it should be used.

Research by Associate Professor David Denkenberger (Mechanical Engineering) and Juan Garcia Martinez is exploring how leaves from crops and forage plants can be processed into leaf protein concentrate for human consumption, while some of the remaining fibre is converted into sugar. The project aims to make better use of plant material that is not typically consumed, potentially increasing food production from existing land. This work forms part of a broader effort to identify practical ways to strengthen global food resilience in the event of severe disruption to food systems.

Associate Professor Matt Hobbs (Health) has been awarded \$1.2million from the Health Research Council to lead a project investigating the health impacts of community water fluoridation, and a \$1.39 million Health Delivery Project examining equitable access to treatment for people with kidney disease.

The Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, in partnership with Creative New Zealand, strengthened its engagement with Pacific communities and cultural sectors through the appointment of leading Samoan musician and producer Posenai Mavaega as the 2026 Pacific Artist in Residence.

The PhD Publishing Scholarship, funded through philanthropic donations, provides short-term support to doctoral students after they submit their thesis for examination, enabling them to prepare their research for publication. In the first three months since its introduction, 35 scholarships have been awarded and 5 articles have been submitted for publication.

People – Nurturing Staff, Thriving Students

As part of New Zealand Sign Language week in May, Te Ratonga Whaikaha | Student Accessibility Service offered short, introductory, skill-based New Zealand Sign Language training for students and staff which was well attended. This engagement strengthened accessibility and language education for participants.

An interactive education event for students and staff took place during the nationwide Road Safety Week. Representatives from the New Zealand Police, Fire and Emergency NZ, and Hato Hone St John engaged with students and staff to share life-saving messages.

Staff development was supported through academic promotion workshops, where staff considering promotion at all levels took part in practical guidance and question-and-answer sessions with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and People and Culture. These workshops also provided an opportunity for academic staff to connect, share experiences and strengthen practice.

With the challenge of rising fuel costs, a commuting carpool scheme was launched for staff, with the aim to foster connection and support staff both off and on campus. It allows staff to connect online and arrange shared rides.

On campus, the People and Culture team ran a *Know Your Neighbour* Challenge during the month of May, inviting colleagues to engage in a range of activities. This initiative encouraged connections within and across teams.

A new feature in the UC Mobile App was released in May. The *Student Employability Assessment* feature is an interactive self-reflection tool designed to help students better understand their readiness for future careers and provides insights to our Employability team.

Health and Safety:

Health and Safety leadership training was delivered to Heads of Department and Heads of Service areas in May. The course was delivered in two half day sessions and covered practical health, safety and wellbeing content. The course is part of the ongoing strengthening of health and safety for all staff and students.

Internationalisation – Locally Engaged, Globally Networked

On 4 June UC hosted the newly appointed Indian High Commissioner, Her Excellency Ms Muanpuii Saiawi, and Sunil Kaushal, Chief Executive, India New Zealand Business Council. During a tour of Engineering's Formula One lab, students met the High Commissioner and delivered a presentation on the project, which was very well received.

The China Ministry of Education has announced that both of UC's applications for Joint Education Institutes have been approved. A Science and Engineering focussed institute with Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology, and an Education focussed institute with Shanghai Normal University will begin operation in China in September 2026, with student volume scaling up until 2029. The two new institutes add to UC's existing joint programme in Mathematics with Qufu Normal University.

Organisational Efficacy – of a sustainable scale by 2030

Based on the student numbers published in the University 2025 Annual Reports, UC is now the 3rd largest provider of student tuition in the country by head count, and Equivalent full time students (EFTS).

See the table below:

Consolidated	Auckland	AUT	Waikato	Massey	VUW	UC	Lincoln	Otago	TOTAL 2025
Total EFTS	39,183	20,668	13,095	16,384	16,332	19,396	3,664	19,126	147,848
Total Headcount	49,901	27,608	16,493	26,285	21,143	27,121	5,474	21,549	195,574

Environmentally Sustainable

UC contributed a significant new research resource for New Zealand’s low-emissions transition through publication of a Data Descriptor in Scientific Data (Nature Portfolio). Led by Rafaella Canessa, the open-access dataset projects national energy demand to 2050 across five transition pathways, and covers electricity, heating and transport. It provides regional demand data for solid, liquid and gaseous fuels - including fossil, bio-based and synthetic carriers - plus hourly electricity demand across sectors, creating a concrete evidence base for planners, researchers and industry modelling a more sustainable and resilient energy system.

UC’s environmental sustainability impact is also visible through its graduates. Seanoa Junior Harry Leiataua, who recently completed a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and International Relations, with a minor in Human Resources Management, is now working in Samoa as a Research Policy Planning Development Officer. A member of Pacific Youth Activists for Climate Change since 2019, he is contributing to responses to sea-level rise, coastal flooding, saltwater intrusion into freshwater and farmland, cyclone damage, and threats to food security and cultural heritage. His work demonstrates how UC is helping build sustainability capability beyond New Zealand by supporting Pacific leaders responding directly to climate impacts in their own communities.