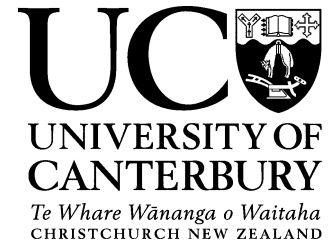


Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council



May 2026

Introduction

The Prime Minister's Science, Innovation and Technology Advisory Council have released a Report to the Prime Minister: *Prioritisation in New Zealand's Science, Innovation and Technology system*. This recommends that the system move to a mission-led framework focussed on four thematic areas in response to key issues facing New Zealand: Primary Industry and Bioeconomy, Technology for Prosperity, Environmental Sustainability and Resilience, and Healthy People and a Thriving Society. There will now be a total pool of funding to support science, innovation and technology with universities forming one part of that pool. The funding will be realigned so that 60% is mission-led, aligned to national priorities, and 40% is investigator-led.

Engagement

In April 3,192 graduates were recognised across the five graduation celebrations with 9,261 friends and whānau supporting them. The Autumn Graduation celebrations and Street Parade are estimated to have contributed close to \$5 million in economic activity through domestic and international visitation, accommodation and hospitality spending across the city.

On 16 April the Advancement team hosted a donor and alumni engagement event at Te Ara Ātea, Rolleston Library, in partnership with Selwyn District Council, centred on the Rita Angus: *He Haerenga ki Cass | A Trip to Cass* exhibition. The event connected UC graduate Rita Angus's artistic legacy with the University's long association with Cass field station, a place of enduring significance for generations of UC alumni. It also provided a valuable opportunity to engage donors, graduates, and regional partners around UC's cultural heritage and ongoing connection to Canterbury.

In early May the Business School's Department of Economics and Finance delivered an inaugural Indigenous Investment workshop in partnership with Ngāi Tahu Holdings, providing students with direct experience of intergenerational investment decision-making. Students applied commercial analysis alongside iwi values, governance, and long-term impact considerations, supported by Ngāi Tahu leaders and UC academics. The Department also strengthened industry engagement through its Professional Speaker Series, including Sharon Zollner, Chief Economist at ANZ, and Jim McElwain, Executive Director of INFINZ.

We hosted our annual STEM Careers Fair on 12 May, attracting strong student engagement with around 2,000 UC students connecting with employers across the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics sectors. The event featured 89 employer exhibitors from a wide range of local and national organisations, including Fulton Hogan, AECOM, Lumin, MainPower and Trimble, Inc., offering insights into career pathways, internships, and graduate opportunities.

Academic staff from the Faculty of Health participated in panel discussions alongside community leaders, rangatahi, and national and international contributors as part of the Te Papa Hauora series of events, sharing insights informed by their research and professional practice.

I participated in a panel discussion on 30 April at the South Island Zones 5-6 Local Government NZ Conference along with Professor Grant Edwards (Lincoln University). The discussion, which was facilitated by Waimakariri Mayor Dan Gordon, focused on partnerships between the tertiary sector and local government to attract technology, talent and international investment, and explored how these collaborations can boost local innovation and leverage academic partnerships to support regional development.

On 18 May I delivered an address to the U3A Avon Ōtākaro group, with many members being UC graduates, as part of their series *Our Christchurch City*. The focus was on UC as an “anchor institution” contributing to the growth and development of the city and Canterbury.

Education – Accessible, Flexible Future Focussed

Our leadership in Work Integrated Learning (WIL) was recognised at a global gathering of sector leaders during April. UC received two awards at the joint conference of WIL New Zealand and the World Association for Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education International Research Symposium. The Centre for Employability and Career Development received the Innovation and Excellence Award for sustained, high-quality practice, while the Collaboration Award recognised UC’s partnership with the Mastering Mountains Charitable Trust through the Professional and Community Engagement internship programme. This recognition reinforces UC’s contribution to international conversations on employability and the future of higher education.

UC is expanding work related opportunities for students. For example, Bachelor of Sport students supported New Zealand’s men’s 3x3 basketball programme through training camps hosted on campus, contributing across performance analysis, logistics and operational support alongside UC staff and national coaching personnel. This applied learning has supported students to develop professional capability in high-performance sporting environments.

In response to student demand, on-campus study spaces have been enhanced and new silent study pods have been installed in the Puaka-James Hight Library. For students studying more remotely, a partnership with WellSouth Primary Health Network has enabled students employed in rural health settings to complete their studies while remaining based in their home regions.

Curriculum development is ongoing with new offerings having been successful in the first Committee of University Academic Programmes (CUAP) round. Of note, are the Masters of Applied Artificial Intelligence and the PGDipPsychAssist, which is the new qualification for Psychology Assistants.

UC’s TEC-funded He Kokonga project, aligned to the Tertiary Education Strategy 2026, is gaining momentum with multiple initiatives now underway to strengthen data-informed approaches to student success. In April a university wide roadshow attracted strong engagement from academic and professional staff, reflecting growing institutional commitment to improving student outcomes.

Research – Impact on a Changing World

The demonstration plant for Zethos (formerly Zincovery), a UC Spinout Company, at Bromley was formally opened in April by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Christopher Luxon. The company uses selective reduction and electrochemical technology to extract in-demand critical minerals from varied sources, including feedstocks, ores, and industrial waste. Compared to traditional extraction methods, Zethos is 50% cheaper, uses 70% less energy and reduces 95% fewer emissions. Zethos joins another critical mineral extraction company developed from UC-based research – Aspiring Materials – in Bromley.

Distinguished Professor Geoff Chase (Mechanical Engineering) had his 100th PhD student completion, a remarkable milestone for any academic and noteworthy not only for the number but for the impact of the research conducted.

Three UC professors - Paul Millar (Humanities), Natalia Chaban (Political Science), and Andy Nicol (Earth and Environmental Sciences) - were selected as 2026 Fellows of the Royal Society Te Apārangi, recognising the international impact and excellence of their work.

The installation of an earthquake sensor in Christchurch's new stadium, Te Kaha – One NZ Stadium, received wide media attention. The installation by SenseiQ, a UC Spinout company, supports the stadium's safety monitoring capability and demonstrates the positive local impact of UC research.

Dr Alex Grabham, Professor Ximena Nelson (Biological Sciences) and international collaborators published research on Bruce, a kea with a disability who used innovation to thrive in his social group and developed a unique jousting fighting technique. The study received wide media coverage.

Professor Dan Zhou (Mechanical Engineering) is the first academic from Oceania to be awarded the America Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) Per Bruel Gold Medal for Noise Control and Acoustics. Professor Zhao's award for 2026 is for *groundbreaking discoveries enabling control of carbon-free-fuelled thermoacoustic instabilities; and for inventing transformative actively passive noise control methods and computational tools that yield quieter, cleaner aerospace and energy technologies*.

Dr Ella Guy (Mechanical Engineering) has won the 2026 Asia-Pacific Association for Biomechanics Yamaguchi Medal, an early career award from the Japanese Society for Mechanical Engineers (JSME).

Professor Sarah Masters (Chemistry) has been elected as the President-Elect of the Federation of Chemical Sciences Societies - Commonwealth Chemistry. The Federation champions equal opportunity, drives innovation and promotes excellence in chemical sciences for the benefit of the Commonwealth nations and their people.

UC PhD student Vincent Lomas (Ngāi Tahu, Waitaha, Kāti Māmoe) from Mathematics was awarded a Royal Society Te Apārangi NZUK Link Foundation scholarship to advance his research tackling inequities in infectious disease outcomes. Vincent will travel to the United Kingdom for two to three months to collaborate with leading researchers.

Two PhD students from Mechanical Engineering (Alice Cerdeira, Ben Robertson) have won National Science Foundation (NSF, USA) funded places to the 23rd International Summer Leadership Academy on Bio-X: AI in Healthcare, Medicine, and Biology to be held in June 2026. Alice has also been awarded the A.H. Couch Trust Heart Foundation Scholarship from the NZ National Heart Foundation to support her spending a year at the University of Liege as part of a UC-Liege dual-award doctoral degree.

UC was one of three recipients of the new Kiwi Space Activator pilot programme funding, aligned with the New Zealand Space and Advanced Aviation Strategy Objectives, which aims to support local space technology research. Associate Professor Sarah Kessans received a grant of \$600 000 for her research into demonstrating biological microgravity experimentation on a spaceplane.

People – Nurturing Staff, Thriving Students

Free flu vaccinations were made available to all staff and students from 1 April. The new option for staff of a walk-in service at the University Pharmacy is proving popular and increasing uptake and is a good complement to the Health Centre's bookable service.

Over 200 students and staff took part in the City to Surf in March, with both UC red t-shirts and the UC barbeque tent prominent throughout.

The staff professional development offerings for 2026 have a focus on leadership development, now extended to those who are aspiring leaders. The range of practical workshops include Managing

Recruitment and Onboarding, Managing Performance, Managing Remuneration and Benefits, Managing Leave, and Navigating Conflict.

In April the Faculty of Engineering hosted a team from Fonterra, many of whom are our alumni, where they ran an Assessment Centre for recruiting the next group of student interns. This innovation supported Fonterra and our students to more easily connect with each other.

Congratulations to Dr Piet van Hasselt of the School of Health Sciences who is the coach of the New Zealand men's 3x3 basketball team which won the Asia Cup in April and has secured a spot in the World Cup in Poland in June.

Following the Government's introduction of the National Fuel Plan, a Business Continuity Coordinating Group was convened to monitor developments and ensure appropriate business continuity plans are in place. UC is operating as usual, with teaching, research and campus activities continuing as planned. There is currently no immediate impact on UC operations, and we will continue to follow Government guidance as it evolves.

Health and Safety

After a lengthy period of discussions the City Council has agreed to install a zebra crossing on Ilam Road, near the junction of Homestead Lane. Works will commence in July.

A training programme for the Senior Leadership Team, facilitated by HSE Global, is completed. Training is now underway for Heads and Managers who report to the Senior Leadership Team.

Internationalisation – Locally Engaged, Globally Networked

On 30 March we formalised a new partnership with IIT-Madras, India, through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The agreement strengthens UC's engagement with India and supports our developing Transnational Education (TNE) initiatives, establishing a framework for collaboration across degree programmes, online education, research, and academic exchange. A key feature of the partnership is a structured Master's pathway, enabling IIT-Madras Bachelor of Science students to progress into our Master of Applied Data Science, including flexible study options through Tuihono UC | UC Online.

International conversations focused on partnerships in the Online and on-campus space in the past month. In April UC signed MoUs with 4 overseas Universities (IIT Madras, Anurag University, Sri Sri University and Fiji University) to partner in the delivery of hybrid TNE programmes. UC Online also launched the Bachelor of Criminal Justice and Bachelor of Health in this time adding to the suite of online offerings.

Professors Kathryn MacCallum and Cheryl Brown (Education) jointly hosted a symposium on Pacific Voices in AI with Fiji National University and Commonwealth of Learning in Suva in April. Participants comprised educators from the Fijian tertiary sector, NGOs, and Ministry departments, who collaborated on future directions.

A Joint Satellite Laboratory was launched in April on the campus of our research partner, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Deputy Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation, Lucy Johnston, represented UC at formal launch events that were attended by Ministerial and other senior leaders in Malaysia. Both institutions commit to jointly develop capability in priority areas including AI, immersive technologies, extended reality (XR), and advanced computing.

On 24–25 March, University of Canterbury welcomed Tuvalu Prime Minister Feleti Teo during his visit to Christchurch, where he met with Vice-Chancellor Professor Cheryl de la Rey, Tuvaluan students and members of UC's Pacific community. The visit included the panel discussion *our whenua, our waters*, co-hosted by UC, the Tuvalu Embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which explored how Indigenous knowledge and science can work together to strengthen climate resilience and support communities facing rising seas.

Another notable international connection in education has involved Antarctic Studies. Professor Daniela Liggett visited Monaco on invitation by the University of the Arctic and the Prince Albert I of Monaco Foundation for the 3rd Monaco Polar Symposium and an event on Antarctic academic collaboration. As part of these events, the International Antarctic Institute (IAI) was relaunched. This is a global multi-campus educational consortium that offers specialised cryosphere science programs. With partners from nine countries, it allows students to take cross-accredited courses in polar studies (such as ice sheets, glaciers, and permafrost) at various participating universities worldwide.

In March the Faculty of Law, in cooperation with the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT), and the Hague Conference on Private International Law, organised the Christchurch Conference on International and Transnational Legal Frameworks. The conference addressed issues relating to cross-border business-to-business transactions, agricultural trade, investment, artificial intelligence, cross-border family law, and modern slavery, with an emphasis on legal instruments of importance to Pacific Island nations. Keynote speakers included Justice David Goddard (Singapore International Commercial Court; former Judge of the New Zealand Court of Appeal), Ignacio Tirado (Secretary-General, UNIDROIT), and Justice Vui Nelson (UC alumnus; Judge of the Supreme Court of Samoa).

Organisational Efficacy – of a sustainable scale by 2030

The Jack Mann Auditorium and Cinema received a Gold Award at the 2026 NZ Commercial Projects Awards on Friday 15 May. Keith Lilley, Gareth Jones, and Annarose Smith from the Facilities Management Capital Development team attended the event.

The build of Takurua, the new Recreation Centre, is on time and on budget.

The Connectivity Refresh programme, which is a refresh of UC's network, has started and will enable a transformation in the security, agility, resiliency and performance of UC's network over the next 3 years. The connectivity team has also continued work in refreshing the Wireless and Wired networks in our Halls of residence, providing a significant leap in experience for our students in Halls. Over the Easter break the team completed the Tupuānuku hall, with the remaining halls scheduled to be completed by end of June.

The Higher Degree and Ethics management project has also commenced. The preferred solution is to scale the existing Endpoint IQ platform, successfully implemented recently in partnership with Research and Innovation. This project is planned to go live in 2027.

Along with the Executive Director – Planning, Finance and Digital Services, I hosted two all staff hui on 30 April and 6 May to provide an overview of the 2025 UC Annual Report. The first hui was also recorded and published on the intranet. An overview of 2025 financial and non-financial results was provided, including in comparison to other Universities, and there was an opportunity for staff to ask questions. The events were well attended and well received, with attendees valuing having a greater understanding of UC's financial position and associated demands and trade-offs, particularly at the outset of 2027 budget planning.

Early in May several New Zealand universities were impacted by a worldwide cyber security attack which affected their learning management systems and caused delays in course timelines. UC's use of an open source learning management system safeguarded the University against the attack by keeping data in-house, and learning operations were unaffected.

Environmentally Sustainable

A recent study led by PhD candidate David Pedley and Professor Justin Morgenroth used AI, aerial imagery and LiDAR data to map urban tree canopy loss across Christchurch with unprecedented precision. Their research found that nearly 14.5% of the city's urban tree canopy disappeared between 2016 and 2021, most of it on residential land. By identifying tree loss at the scale of individual properties, the tool could help

councils and communities make more informed decisions about protecting urban forests, which play a vital role in cooling cities, improving air quality, supporting biodiversity and enhancing wellbeing.

UC researcher Daniel Hernández-Carrasco has been internationally recognised in the 2026 Frontiers Planet Prize for research examining how climate change is disrupting Earth's natural seasons. His work explores how shifts in snowmelt, river flows, migration patterns and breeding cycles can ripple through ecosystems, affecting biodiversity and food systems. The research also highlights practical strategies for environmental management, particularly in New Zealand's river ecosystems.

Together, these projects demonstrate how UC researchers are developing science-based tools and knowledge to help communities respond to environmental change and build more sustainable futures.