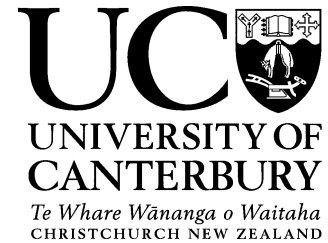


# Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council



September 2026

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## Introduction

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While most students are moving into the final quarter of the academic year, a large cohort of graduates participated in the Spring Graduation Celebrations at Wolfbrook Arena on 25 August, with over 1,000 graduates and approximately 4,500 whānau and friends celebrating their achievements. UC also awarded an Honorary Doctorate to Tan Sri Datuk Oh Siew Nam P.S.M., P.J.N., who graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering with Honours in Electrical Engineering in 1962. The honorary doctorate recognised Tan Sri Oh's outstanding contribution to business, finance, public service and philanthropy, as well as his enduring connection to UC and support for Malaysian students.

The University of Canterbury and Ara Institute of Canterbury signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Friday 14 August to create clearer, more flexible pathways for students. The partnership agreement establishes pre-approved pathways between Ara and UC qualifications, creating opportunities for a wider pool of talent. It is the first of its kind in New Zealand between a university and a polytechnic. The Minister for Tertiary Education, Hon Penny Simmonds, was the main speaker with the Ara CE Darren Mitchell and I speaking on behalf of our institutions. Also in attendance was Deputy Mayor Victoria Henstock and senior leaders and staff from both institutions.

At a recent Project Canterbury event the Prime Minister highlighted the significant contribution of the University of Canterbury to Canterbury's economic growth and innovation ecosystem, recognising the University's role in developing talent, supporting research, and helping to drive the region's expanding technology and start-up sectors. He noted that UC had been an important contributor to Christchurch's post-earthquake transformation and future growth, providing the skilled graduates, expertise, and industry connections needed to support the region's ongoing economic development and competitiveness.

## Engagement

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Rā Tōmene | Open Day was held on 28 August. Record numbers of prospective students and their whānau registered from across New Zealand, to explore what studying and living at UC could look like. Throughout the day, visitors explored study options through information sessions and faculty activities, toured campus and accommodation, experienced demonstrations and facilities, and spoke directly with UC staff and students about study and student life.

UC hosted its annual Rongo o te Wā | Careers Advisors Update Conference during 27–28 August, bringing careers advisors from across New Zealand to campus to hear about the latest developments at UC, including new programmes and study options, accommodation and teaching facilities.

The annual Raising the Bar event was held on 15 September, with 20 free talks by UC academics across 10 local bars. The event attracted 1,285 alumni, staff, students and members of the wider community, showcasing the breadth and relevance of our research while creating an accessible way for people to engage with UC beyond campus.

UC partnered with WORD Christchurch Festival again this year and presented two sessions: Booker Prize Winner Shehan Karunatilaka (an Ursula Bethell Writer in Residence), and UC Senior Fellow Dr Lucy Hone's talk called *How Will I Ever Get through This?* A new book published by Canterbury University Press was launched during the WORD festival, *Emergence: New Writing from the University of Canterbury Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*, featuring the work of 26 students and graduates of UC's Master of Writing degree. We also hosted the successful Inspiring Minds: Secondary Schools Day at our campus.

The University launched New Zealand's first Media Innovation Lab to support public-interest journalism through funded 12-week residencies, providing journalists with time, resources, technology, and academic expertise to develop innovative storytelling projects. Backed by a \$50,000 contribution from the Acland Foundation, the programme was established to help journalists experiment with new forms of digital storytelling, strengthen connections with communities, and explore the use of technology for social good. The Lab appointed Charlie Mitchell of The Press as its inaugural journalist-in-residence, where he developed a project focused on the cultural, environmental, and social significance of Te Waihora|Lake Ellesmere, using new storytelling approaches to engage audiences with complex issues.

On Thursday 20 August, UC hosted members of our Auckland alumni community for a panel featuring three UC alums, Julia Pahina, Guy Horrocks and Dean Anderson. The discussion explored career pivots, leadership, purpose, and navigating change. The event provided a valuable opportunity to strengthen engagement with our Auckland alumni and donor community.

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

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The past month has had a strong focus on employability. Several recent activities highlight the importance of strong partnerships between UC and industry to prepare our students for the workforce. For example, Mechanical Engineering hosted an industry connect event which attracted over 100 industry members, UC staff and students, to show industry around the labs, and provide an event to enable useful conversations between students, UC staff and industry members. Dr James Williams, Senior Lecturer at the School of Mathematics and Statistics, recently published an article in The Times Higher Education on *How to run industry-enriched project-based learning in STEM*, outlining strategies to deliver real value to industry partners and prepare graduates for professional practice.

The University's Centre for Employability and Career Development convened an industry panel bringing together employers, industry leaders, and UC staff for a conversation on graduate workforce readiness. Panellists Jeremy Podany (CEO, The Career Leadership Collective), Helen Mason (Head of Workforce Strategy, ASB), Seren Wilson (Director, Talent Solutions), and Roger Ford (Managing Director, Innovise NZ) led an engaging conversation, sharing their expertise in the areas of workforce strategy, graduate recruitment, higher education, and AI's impact on the workplace.

UC continues to be a sector leader in Student Success as well. Building on the work of He Kokonga on developing a student-centric data base, UC led a Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) webinar on *Data for Accelerating Student Success*.

## Research – Impact on a Changing World

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The annual Research Student Showcase was held at the Court Theatre on Wednesday 19 August, attracting an audience of approximately 300 and providing a valuable stewardship opportunity for donors and supporters of UC research, including the Canterbury Medical Research Foundation, ENVCO and Beca Christchurch. The event featured 10 finalists from across faculties competing in the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition, where they explained the what, how and why of their thesis research in just three minutes, and also recognised the winners of the Exhibit Your Thesis competition and the Thesis Film Festival. Feedback from both attendees and supporters was exceptionally positive, with many valuing the opportunity to see the breadth of research being undertaken at UC, the talent of current postgraduate students, and the benefits of hosting the event in the city rather than on campus.

Associate Professor Tim Chambers and Christina Pike (Ngāi Tahu Research Centre) and collaborators from the Universities of Auckland and Otago have been awarded a Canterbury Medical Research Foundation Major Project Grant. Their national retrospective cohort study will investigate nitrate in drinking water and adverse pregnancy outcomes, providing important New Zealand evidence on the potential health effects of nitrate exposure during pregnancy.

On Friday 14 August, on behalf of UC, Professor Lucy Johnston signed a Deed of Agreement at Tāwhaki National Aerospace Centre on Kaitorete, to formalise the relationship between Tāwhaki Joint Venture and UC that has developed since Tāwhaki was established in 2021. The partnership will expand opportunities for Canterbury rangatahi to pursue careers and research in aerospace, environmental science and whenua rejuvenation, grounded in mātauranga Māori, providing a framework for aligning UC research, education, and innovation expertise with the mana whenua-led aspirations of Tāwhaki for Kaitorete. UC students and researchers are already involved in collaborative projects at Kaitorete spanning meteorology, engineering, ecology, and environmental research. Joint programmes such as Space Camp also introduce rangatahi to aerospace, environmental science and STEM, including mātauranga Māori, through hands-on learning.

## People – Nurturing Staff, Thriving Students

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A number of student events have been run by the UCSA throughout August and September. Term 4 started, among other events, with a welcome barbeque, a quiz night and a karaoke night. There was also the re-launching of English Cafés, which are conversational practice sessions for international students, and a cultural festival, Barrio Fiesta 2026. DramaSoc hosted student theatre performances at the Ngaio Marsh Theatre.

UC has been named the most attractive employer in New Zealand's education sector in the 2026 Randstad Employer Brand Research – a global study that spans 34 markets and is based on opinions from workers and job seekers aged 18 to retirement age. The education sector was ranked the second-most attractive sector overall in New Zealand, behind professional services. UC also performed strongly against the country's leading employers, sitting just 0.1 percentage points outside the top 10 most attractive organisations.

954 staff took the opportunity to have their influenza vaccination paid by UC this winter, up from 750 staff in 2024. For the past two years the University Pharmacy has offered a walk-up service. This has increased overall numbers protected by the vaccine, and also means that about 450 staff have transferred from the Health Centre's bookable service, freeing capacity for services to students. The Pharmacy also offer Covid vaccinations.

The STEPtember challenge is being re-run for staff and students in 2026, following a successful 2025 campaign. This campaign has been extended to include WELLtember, designed to include non-physical challenges such as building good sleep and dietary habits.

New additions to the staff development programme include two leadership workshops *The Strategic and Operating Environment* and *Culturally Responsive Leadership*, a course on *Digital Information Management at UC*, and a workshop on *Finance Cybersecurity Awareness*.

A range of activities for students and staff marked Te Wiki o te Reo Māori (Māori Language Week) in mid September. Te Akatoki, the Māori Students Association, hosted daily events to encourage ākonga (students) and kaimahi (staff) to engage with the language through learning-based games. The UC Māori team and Te Akatoki jointly hosted a quiz night, during which attendees had the opportunity to test their knowledge about, and to practise, their reo. The UC Māori Facebook page ran virtual tours of taone (towns) and marae across Christchurch, highlighting vocabulary, phrases and historical milestones.

### **Health and Safety**

HSE Global delivered the final Safety Leadership training sessions in early September, targeted at Academic Heads of Department and Service Unit Managers. HSE Global are delivering train-the-trainer sessions to the UC Health and Safety team, enabling the Safety Leadership training programme to be facilitated in-house for staff in the future.

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

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UC's first India Open Day series commenced in Mumbai on 31 August, with further events in Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Kochi. Prospective students and their families were able to explore UC degree and pathway options, speak directly with academics and staff, hear from Indian UC graduates about their study and career experiences, and learn more about student life in Christchurch. The events have also provided tailored guidance on entry pathways, academic and student support, and career and employability opportunities.

UC sponsored 2 tables at the Malaysia Business Council's annual Malaysia Day Dinner in Christchurch on Friday 28 August, supporting our ongoing engagement with Malaysian alumni and strengthening connections with the wider Malaysian community. Executive Dean of Engineering Professor Saurabh Sinha and Assistant Dean of Engineering Pedro Lee joined other UC representatives and alumni guests at the event, with Professor Sinha representing the University as a featured speaker on the programme. The dinner provided a valuable opportunity to deepen relationships with key local donors and influencers while supporting UC's broader engagement with alumni and partners in Malaysia.

The Faculty of Law signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Carleton University that will allow students who have successfully completed a BA in Legal Studies at Carleton University to pursue an LLB at UC in 3 years (instead of the usual 4 year LLB degree). This is the first New Zealand Law School with such an agreement with a Canadian University.

I was a speaker at an Indian Independence Day Flag Hoisting Ceremony on 15 August. The event marked the 79<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of India's Independence and brought together members of the community to celebrate the occasion and the friendship between India and New Zealand.

## Organisational Efficacy

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A recent TEC report to Minister Penny Simmonds showed that 354,695 people were enrolled in tertiary education and training, a 1% decrease compared with the previous year. This decline was driven by a 5% reduction in vocational education and training enrolments, although higher education enrolments increased by 4%. Overall participation equated to 203,918 equivalent full-time students (EFTS), representing 2% growth year-on-year. Universities experienced increases in EFTS delivery, with the largest gains recorded at the University of Auckland and the University of Canterbury, both achieving 8% growth. Together, these institutions accounted for nearly half of the overall increase in higher education delivery.

Student Management Release 60 was successfully deployed in August, delivering a redesigned Internal Student Transcript in ourUC that improves access to academic records and reduces reliance on legacy systems. The release also introduced enhancements to Offer of Place, enrolment and doctoral administration processes, helping improve the staff experience and the reliability of UC's student administration platform.

## Environmentally Sustainable

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Dr David Pedley graduated on 25 August. As part of his PhD he developed geospatial and deep-learning methods using aerial imagery and LiDAR data to measure tree-canopy loss at individual-property level. His research found that Christchurch lost about 14.5% of its urban tree canopy between 2016 and 2021. Dr Pedley is now applying this UC-developed expertise at Christchurch-based MyNativeForest, assessing land across New Zealand for native planting and New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme projects that support biodiversity, carbon sequestration and long-term retention of native bush.

New international research involving UC environmental psychologist Dr Claudia Schneider was published in *Nature Sustainability* in August, providing timely evidence about how to encourage more effective personal climate action. Across three studies involving 2,924 participants, the researchers found that people often overestimate familiar actions such as recycling and reducing food waste, while underestimating higher-impact choices such as flying less, driving less and reducing red-meat consumption. The study, *Psychological barriers to improving carbon competence*, shows that climate communication must address habits and psychological biases rather than simply provide more information. A local follow-up study now underway is examining how New Zealanders understand climate action and which communication strategies can best support meaningful reductions in emissions.