

Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council



February 2026

Introduction

UC is on track to record its sixth consecutive year of enrolment growth, finishing 2025 with more than 27,000 students and continuing the upward trend in 2026. Growth has been driven by strong domestic enrolments, both from within the Canterbury region and around the country, alongside international demand in both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Semester 1 started on 16 February and was preceded by several events:

Minister for Universities Hon Dr Shane Reti officially opened UC's new hall Tupuārangi on 12 February, alongside Mayor Phil Mauger, Chancellor Hon Amy Adams, and myself.

On 13 February we welcomed over 2,200 students to campus for Welcome Day, an informative and inclusive event that introduced students to their programmes of study, support networks and the wider UC community.

Congratulations to College House, which in late November celebrated its 175th anniversary. College House was established in 1850 as part of Christ's College and in 1873 became the first residential college to the forerunner of UC, Canterbury College. It moved from the city to its Waimari Road site in 1970.

Engagement

In mid-December UC was the accommodation provider for the 2025 Special Olympics National Summer Games, via accommodation partners Arcady, College House and UniLodge. Over five nights, 7,500 beds were provided to competitors, coaches, supporters, and officials. Around 20 students in the Bachelor of Digital Screen (Hons) collaborated with the Special Olympics team, filming and producing video content for the Games. This provided valuable hands-on experience, allowing students to apply technical and creative skills in a live, high-pressure professional context. The montage created by the students was shown at the opening ceremony of the Games.

At the start of February, via the UC Neighbourhood Meet and Greet, residents from the Ilam and Riccarton areas were invited to meet the key stakeholders at UC and UCSA – including the Director of Facilities Management, Director of People and Culture, Security Manager and the new UCSA President. After short introductions the community was invited to talk one-to-one with hosts and learn more about events and projects at UC and UCSA this year.

The second drop-in session for Takurua, the new student facility replacing the current recreation centre, was held on Tuesday 10 February. Representatives from the project team shared building updates and visuals with members of the community.

On 15 January the Teece Museum team hosted the opening of the Bricks of Olympus exhibition, which runs until 19 April. The launch event in the Great Hall of the Arts Centre included opportunities for children to assemble a giant mosaic and participate in Maths Crafts, supported by colleagues and students from the Department of Mathematics and Statistics. Inside the museum 250,000 Lego bricks have been used to create a spectacular mobile theatre, built by Jake Roos and Emily Fryer (winner and runner up in Season One of LEGO Masters New Zealand). More than 1,400 visitors were welcomed on the opening day, marking the event as a great success.

In mid-January UC academics engaged with the community as part of Robot Week at Shirley Library, inviting young people and their families to explore robotics and artificial intelligence in fun, accessible, and thoughtful ways. UC Professor Kathryn MacCallum and PhD candidate Angel Moore (Education), along with Associate Professor Yilei Zhang and PhD candidate Shimanto Sarker (Engineering), collaborated with Christchurch City Libraries to help demystify AI and encourage informed conversations about how these technologies are shaping everyday life.

The *Whāia te Taniwha* exhibition at Christchurch Art Gallery is grounded in *Taniwha: A Cultural History*, a Marsden Fund research project led by Dr Kirsty Dunn and Dr Madi Williams (Aotahi: School of Māori and Indigenous Studies, Faculty of Arts) and demonstrates an excellent translation of research into public-facing cultural practice.

Education – Accessible, Flexible Future Focussed

Thrive lectures were delivered to approximately 2,000 incoming students throughout the same week as Welcome Day, with the purpose of showing first years how to navigate the start of the year. Halls offered orientation-style activities, and UniLife welcomed 563 students in a programme for students not in halls to foster social connection and academic preparation - a four-fold increase compared to 2025. For the first year, UniLife offered a summer programme with over 100 participants who stayed on to support the newcomers at the beginning of the year.

This year had the busiest summer school period in the last five years with 2,374 students taking part in summer school, an increase of nearly 300 students compared to the year before. While many students were taking classroom courses, the PACE programme, which is focused on work-integrated learning, welcomed its largest cohort to date with more than 140 students from all faculties undertaking internships with a wide range of regional and national organisations. Students worked with employers across the technology, government, health, and not-for-profit sectors, gaining valuable experience that supports employability, interdisciplinary learning, and community engagement.

The TEC-funded *He Kokonga* student success initiative successfully completed its first year of the two-year programme. The implementation plan has since been endorsed, and four of the seven Quarter One initiatives commenced in January. These initiatives focus on improving data quality and accessibility, strengthening data capability across the institution, and leveraging technology to support successful student outcomes.

The library was part of successful CAUL consortium negotiations concluded in December 2025, resulting in new Read and Publish agreements with Elsevier, Taylor & Francis, Springer Nature, and Wiley. These agreements provide comprehensive access to key journals and uncapped publishing opportunities for UC researchers, while delivering improved value for money and price certainty over the coming years.

Emeritus Professor Phil Bones was featured in national media for his leadership of an innovative engineering project in which UC graduates developed an animatronic bird inspired by the South Island kōkako.

Student success was recognised at a national level, with Louise McDermott, a Bachelor of Environmental Science with Honours student, receiving the New Zealand Coastal Society 2025 Undergraduate Excellence Award for her academic achievement and commitment to coastal studies.

Research – Impact on a Changing World

UC researchers continue to lead advances in important technologies and economic growth. New grants in 2026 include awards to Associate Professor Sarah Kessans (Product Design), from the Ministry of Primary Industries, for the project *Towards the delivery of commercially viable pasture-based methane inhibitor solutions*, and to Professor Aaron Marshall (Chemical and Process Engineering) for a Horizon Europe project looking at clean energy *Next-generation scalable AEM electrolyzers as sustainable hydrogen production system (NEREUS)*.

Three other UC researchers – Professor Wolfgang Rack (Gateway Antarctica), Associate Professor Mads Thomsen (Biological Sciences), and Dr Hamish Avery (Electric Power Engineering Centre) – have also received new funding through involvement in Horizon Europe projects. Dr Avery is part of the MBIE-led delegation currently in Europe to lobby for the inclusion of associated countries in the next iteration of Horizon and to host a booth at the Horizon Europe information days in Brussels.

Four UC projects were among the 15 nationally funded projects within the inaugural cohort of MBIE's Applied Doctorates Scheme, involving collaboration between universities and industry partners. The University has funded another four UC projects from the MBIE shortlist through the UC Connect Doctoral Scholarship Scheme to continue the collaborations with the industry partners.

In a time of increasing serious weather events, new research led by Postdoctoral Fellow Dr Lea Dasallas (Civil and Environmental Engineering) as part of a Horizon Europe project, points to the importance of shifting from static flood maps to dynamic models to improve urban resilience and emergency planning. Her recently published research shows that even shallow floodwater can be powerful enough to knock people off their feet or sweep vehicles away if it is moving fast enough. Most public flood maps to date focus almost entirely on how deep water gets, not how quickly it flows.

A new CryoLab in the Department of Mechanical Engineering is New Zealand's only research group combining cutting-edge cryogenic refrigeration research and development as well as consulting to industry in cryogenics, fluids and thermodynamics. Cryogenics is a key enabler for technologies that rely on extremely low temperatures, including MRI scanners, superconductors, night-vision systems, low-noise sensors, satellites, space telescopes, biological storage, quantum computing and cryogenic fuels such as liquefied natural gas and liquid hydrogen.

A research collaboration with Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has commenced with joint funding of seed projects bringing together researchers from UC and UTM. A formal opening of the virtual joint research laboratory will be held in Malaysia in April 2026.

The Times Higher Education (THE) Subject Rankings were released in January, ranking the top institutions in each of the 11 major subject areas. UC's global rank improved in two subjects (Business and Economics, Law) and our rank within New Zealand increased in three subjects (Business and Economics, Computer Science, Law) and decreased in one subject (Arts and Humanities).

Time Magazine has produced a new ranking of the top 500 world universities. Six New Zealand universities were included in the top 500 with UC ranked 259th, behind the Universities of Auckland (88) and Otago (155) and above VUW (261), Lincoln (416) and Waikato (440).

Professor Clemency Montelle (Mathematics and Statistics) has become the first person from outside the United Kingdom to receive the Agnes Mary Clerke medal from the Royal Astronomical Society. The medal for Historical Research in Astronomy or Geophysics is presented by the UK's Royal Astronomical Society every three years. Professor Montelle received the 2026 medal in recognition of her outstanding research in the history of astronomy, particularly her ground-breaking scholarship on Indian mathematical astronomy and other major pre-modern astronomical traditions, and the connections between them.

Associate Professor Enda Crossin (Electrical Engineering) was awarded the Australasian Association for Engineering Education's Research Design Award for his leadership of The BeLongEng Project.

PhD student Kate Truman (Data Science) was awarded the Publisher's Award for Excellence in Systematic Research (2025) by the Society of Systematic Biologists and Oxford University Press.

People – Nurturing Staff, Thriving Students

The Start of Year Communications Campaign to students, run via social and on-campus media, has provided new students with the information they need in their first term at UC to ensure they have the best possible start, go on to have a positive student experience, and successfully complete their first year of study. They have received information to raise awareness on important topics including meningitis, prevention of harmful sexual behaviour, health and safety, and the availability of student support services. Students were advised of events, groups and activities available from both UC and the UCSA, and were encouraged to make the most of their time at UC by getting involved in a range of experiences and meeting new people.

UC presented 66 student leaders across all halls of residence with the Residential Advisor|Taurima micro credential, in recognition of the skills and experience gained in 2025 while working in the role.

A new initiative this year was a Start of Year Staff Marketplace, to provide information for staff about services, benefits and support available to UC employees. There were 20 stalls with information on a range of topics, for example the Analytics for Course Engagement (ACE) programme, UOnline, Cybersecurity, Staff Wellbeing, Capability and Benefits. UC staff now have access to a new purchasing discounts scheme that includes offers for shopping, entertainment and travel.

The UC Accommodation Services team received the 2025 International Education Association New Zealand Pioneer Partners Award, in recognition of the Accommodation Student Ambassadors programme that has championed global citizenship and developed cross-cultural leadership within halls of residence over the past three years.

Health and Safety

The Minister for Workplace and Safety has announced regulatory changes for research, teaching and testing laboratories, after representations from a sector group in which UC played a central role. Currently laboratories are subject to the same regulatory requirements as industrial operations that use hazardous substances. By the end of this year there will be new regulations for the sector and an Approved Code of Practice that will set out guidance on how to manage risks. Universities New Zealand and the Independent Research Association of New Zealand estimate that the costs of compliance, unless changes were made, was likely to be between \$1.5 billion to \$3 billion.

Internationalisation – Locally Engaged, Globally Networked

UC's international academic connections remain strong, with 29 Erskine Visitors scheduled to arrive in Semester One and 6 UC academic staff undertaking Erskine Grants overseas. These exchanges continue to enrich UC's teaching and research environment through international collaboration.

On 23 January, UC and the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP) signed an Memorandum of Understanding continuing into a fourth term. The partnership is globally significant - UC researchers are investigating topics that are critical to Antarctica's future, such as climate change impacts on ecosystems, atmosphere and ice, the impact of microplastics, and air-chemistry climate interactions.

A research collaboration with Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) has commenced with joint funding of seed projects bringing together researchers from UC and UTM. A formal opening of the virtual joint research laboratory will be held in Malaysia in April 2026.

UC hosted 109 summer school participants from 20 Chinese universities for a 2-week short program on Global Competence Development. This course provides an opportunity to promote understanding of New Zealand's place in the world and its cultural distinctiveness, including Māori and Tangata Whenua.

In January I travelled to Tonga together with a UC delegation, including Distinguished Professor Steven Ratuva as PVC Pacific. We were hosted by Lord Feleti Sevele, UC alumnus and Honorary Doctorate recipient, and the National Reserve Bank of Tonga. While there, the UC-Lincoln University Tonga Alumni Association was launched, reflecting the growing strength and impact of its alumni community in the region. The alumni launch was graced by the presence of HRH Princess Sālote Mafile'ō Pilolevu and it was livestreamed and watched by some 500 people. We visited a group of UC biomedical engineering students who, as part of an annual training project led by Associate Professor Deborah Munro, were repairing and doing maintenance work on crucial lifesaving equipment such as ventilators, blood pressure monitors and oxygen concentrators. The visit was highlighted through a Radio New Zealand feature in which Associate Professor Munro and Club President Liam Bately discussed the impact of the trip. The itinerary included a meeting with the Prime Minister, who was also present at the alumni launch event. The UC delegation visit was given high profile coverage in the local media. Since our return cooperation is in progress with the Tonga National University and the Tonga Campus of the University of South Pacific.

In early February a UC delegation spent time in India, participating in the QS India Summit and meeting with a number of potential partner institutions. I was invited to speak in the opening spotlight panel on *Philanthropy as a way forward to promote publicly accessible and world-class education in India*. A central theme of the discussion was the importance of institutional clarity of purpose. UC Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation Professor Lucy Johnston,

Executive Dean of Engineering Professor Saurabh Sinha, and Executive Dean of Science Professor Stuart Parsons, joined Indian Institute of Technology Delhi Dean of International Programmes Professor Anil Verma and Director of Ground Force Concrete Consultancy LLP Dr Sivakumar Kandasami, to lead a masterclass on *Partnerships with purpose*. Professor Lucy Johnston also spoke on the panel *Impactful research for nation building*.

Organisational Efficacy – of a sustainable scale by 2030

Continued improvements were made to the University's digital systems and infrastructure during December and January, ensuring core platforms remained robust during the busiest period of the academic calendar. Enhancements to workflow performance, the introduction of automated archiving, and new capabilities that enable staff to update and submit course selections on behalf of students have contributed to improved turnaround times and created a more seamless student experience during a critical time of year.

Work to modernise digital infrastructure across the halls has progressed well over the summer. Students entering the halls in 2026 are benefitting from significantly improved speed, stability, and accessibility of network services, supporting both their academic engagement and wellbeing. These enhancements have been delivered across 37 buildings to date and will continue through to May.

The Cloud Enablement Programme reached completion in December, concluding three years of major transformation activity. The programme has delivered a scalable five-petabyte storage platform, expanded secure cloud services, modernised backup and recovery environments, and deployed a high-performance research compute platform already experiencing strong demand.

Environmentally Sustainable

UC biochemistry student Olivia Cooper was one of the students selected for the Summer Startup Programme, run through the UC Centre for Entrepreneurship (UCE) over 2025/2026, to progress her PacSea venture (formerly Green Shift Packaging). PacSea is developing seaweed-based alternatives to single-use plastics, and biodegradable and home-compostable materials are created to reduce waste and protect the environment. The Summer Startup Programme helped connect Olivia with experts across sustainability, materials science, and product design, and provided an intensive period to progress prototype products.

UC students George Gilbertson, Darcy Kusabs, Bailey Mourton, Ashley Pedersen and Hannah Smith completed a study in December into how targeted trapping is reducing rats, possums, mice and mustelids across the 45-hectare Barnett Park Reserve in Redcliffs. This was undertaken as part of the students' Research for Resilient Communities and Environments UC geography course, and focused on assessing the efficacy of a trapping programme carried out by Predator Free Redcliffs over the past two years. Their report was warmly received, as it established a baseline and provided recommendations for future trap placements based on identified pest hotspots.

Dr Rebecca Peer, UC Senior Lecturer in Civil and Natural Resources Engineering, won a prestigious Mana Tūānuku Research Leader Fellowship in December. This work will develop tools and insights that will guide New Zealand's shift to a resilient, low-carbon energy system. Dr Peer will develop sophisticated modelling tools that integrate energy system analysis with risk, decision-making and policy assessment. These will enable a more informed understanding of the trade-offs between economic, environmental and social pressures when designing energy policies, and help guide New Zealand's transition to clean energy in a secure, efficient and fair manner.