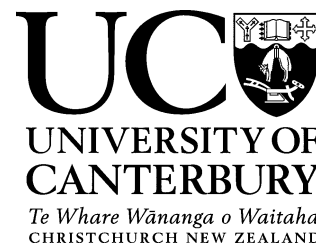


Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council



February 2025

Introduction

At the national level, the year began with the announcement of Hon Dr Shane Reti appointed as Minister of Universities and Science, Innovation and Technology. The government also announced reforms to the Science Sector, with legislation coming in Q2 2025 for implementation in 2026. Changes include the establishment of a new PM's Science, Innovation and Technology Advisory Council, new Intellectual Property rules to incentivise researchers, and the replacement of the seven Crown Research Institutes with three Public Research Organisations (PRO) for Bio-Economy, Earth Sciences and Health and Forensic Science Services. A fourth PRO will be established for Technology to deliver research, capability and commercial outreach around advanced technologies.

New students will be welcomed to Campus on 14 February with the first semester beginning on Monday 17 February. With further growth in student enrolments, the Campus is expected to be buzzing with activities.

In preparation for the year ahead Residential Assistants (RAs) / Taurima participated in a three-week training programme. I was pleased to speak at a welcome event for all RAs, Residential Life staff and leaders from accommodation partners on 4 February.

It was with a sense of pride that we congratulated UC alumni recognised in the New Year Honours List for 2025. Four Companions of the New Zealand Order of Merit, two Officers of the New Zealand Order of Merit, five Members of the New Zealand Order of Merit and five recipients of the King's Service Medal are UC alumni. The full list is available online at [UC alumni receive King's Honours 2025 | University of Canterbury](#).

Engagement

On 30 and 31 January we hosted the Press and TVNZ at Kōawa Studios, with the latter including an interview with Executive Dean Arts Professor Kevin Watson. The film *Holy Days* marked the first commercial use of Kōawa's state of the art facilities, using the new virtual production sound stage in the Jack Mann Theatre for 'simulated travel'. The visits included a tour of our facilities, and a meet and greet with Kōawa technicians and a student intern who worked on the film.

On 4 February the UC Centre for Entrepreneurship (UCE) Summer Startup Showcase was held at The Piano, showcasing the creativity and determination of student innovators from across UC. More than 250 attendees gathered for an inspiring evening where the Top 10 student-led ventures – selected from a cohort of 26 diverse projects – were unveiled. These ventures, developed over ten weeks of rigorous mentorship, spanned a wide array of disciplines, demonstrating the impressive breadth of talent within our University. The cohort included students ranging from undergraduates to PhD candidates and MBAs. The showcase featured groundbreaking ideas such as an automated

bowling machine for cricket enthusiasts, eco-friendly shampoo and conditioner tablets designed for waste-conscious travellers, and enhanced headgear protection for junior rugby players. Other standout projects included a device to make livestock vaccinations faster and safer, and a phone designed to combat 'doom-scrolling' while enhancing user well-being.

On 10 February we held a Community Meeting to present university-related developments and events, including updates on engagement and UCSA Ori'25 events, an overview of UC's student accommodation build, Tupuārangi, and plans for our new recreation centre on Kirkwood Avenue.

During 9-13 February we sponsored the International Conference on Advanced Materials and Nanotechnology (AMN11), chaired by Professor Aaron Marshall in his role at the MacDiarmid Institute. Held at Te Pae, the interdisciplinary conference brought together material scientists, chemists, physicists, biologists and engineers for discussion on topics such as materials for new energy systems, quantum computing and the study of protein structures.

In mid-February the University announced its first donor-funded International Law PhD Scholarship, enabled by a generous gift from distinguished alumna Christine, Lady Brownlie. Lady Brownlie, a former legal scholar based in the United Kingdom, has gifted £50,000 (approximately NZD 105,000) to fund the Faculty of Law scholarship, which will provide full tuition fees and a cost-of-living stipend of NZD 34,000 per year for up to three years.

UC ranks second in New Zealand for employability outcomes and in recognition of our highly skilled, industry leading graduates, we kicked off an Employability campaign on LinkedIn in late February to showcase the success of some of our brightest alumni. Profiles included Keegan Jones, Emma Arvidson, Puneet Saini and Kieran Erasmuson.

Education – Accessible, Flexible Future Focussed

While the academic year officially starts on 17 February, there has already been a large number of students across campus taking part in various summer programmes. Summer school kicked off at the end of 2024 and continued through until February, with nearly 150 courses offered across the summer. The 2025 Takere programme commenced in January with 35 Māori and Pacific students taking part in a programme for building academic success. Led by UC Māori and the Pacific Development team, Takere is part of the broader student success project, Kia Angitu.

Using data to support decision making in student success has received a boost with the new project funded by the Tertiary Education Commission. The Kokonga Whare e Kitea project has commenced, with the aim of informing student success initiatives at a tertiary sector level while accelerating the work that is happening at UC.

This year UC is increasing our Clinical Psychology intake to 26 students following discussions with Hon Matt Doocey, Minister for Mental Health, at the end of last year. The Press highlighted the announcement, showcasing the university as taking proactive steps to address a critical workforce shortage in mental health.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) resources on the Learning and Teaching Hub have been well used throughout January as staff prepare for the academic year. Resources such as *AI Essentials for Educators* and *Gen AI Foundations* are available. Associate Professor David Dempsey, who has been leading AI workshops here at UC, is also sharing his expertise nationwide. David hosted a prompt engineering webinar organised by Engineering New Zealand Te Ao Rangahau.

Drs Kate Pedley, Tim Stahl, and Technician Giles Ostermeijer were awarded one of sixteen Founders' Awards from Bentley Systems (a global infrastructure engineering software company) for an education project in digital visualisation for teaching geosciences.

UCOnline opened its first carousel of 2025 offerings and as was the trend in 2024, enrolments have exceeded expectations. Health continues to be an area of high demand for students and the Faculty of Health has been proactive in delivering excellent programmes. Overall enrolments are 35% ahead of last year and some programmes have shown increases of 40%.

Research – Impact on a Changing World

UC has made strides in improving the international impact of its research, with 5.8% of external funding coming from overseas, compared to 3.48% in 2023. In 2024 the university continued to diversify its research funding sources. Almost 18% of new funding came from non-government sources, a notable increase from 10.5% in 2023.

Grants awarded included Professor Laurie McLay of the Child Well-being Institute receiving a four-year, \$1.4million Health Delivery Research Project Grant from the Health Research Council to investigate digital support for autistic tamariki and their caregivers. Dr Angus Lindsay (Biological Sciences) received \$288 000 for a project exploring therapies for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, including genetic editing, to protect against muscle damage caused by repeated contractions.

UC has been selected as a co-host of the Antarctic Science Platform, a seven-year initiative that will significantly raise the university's profile in New Zealand's Antarctic science community and enhance its external research income.

The Faculty of Engineering, in partnership with the Ara Institute of Canterbury, hosted the 35th Annual Conference of the Australasian Association for Engineering Education (AAEE) during 8-11 December 2024. Chaired by Associate Professor Enda Crossin (Electrical and Computer Engineering), the event attracted ~280 delegates, the largest AAEE conference ever held. The AAEE Executive Committee hailed it as the "best ever" AAEE conference.

Professor Simon Kingham (Earth and Environment) has been selected to join the International Science Council's Global Roster of Experts. His expertise and commitment to advancing Science's role in global policy were recognised as being invaluable. Professor Mads Thomsen (Biological Sciences) was named as one of the Institute for Scientific Information's Highly Cited Researchers. Of the world's population of scientists, Highly Cited Researchers are one in 1,000.

Law has been ranked for the first time in the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings by Subject 2025, securing a position in the 251-300 performance band. Social Sciences at Canterbury leads the subject rankings at 201-250, with Business and Economics joining Law in the 251-300 band.

People – Nurturing Staff, Thriving Students

An enhanced welcome programme has been developed for first year students arriving into the University halls to ensure the start of 2025 is engaging, safe and fun. This includes a range of safe socialising spaces provided by the UCSA, orientation sessions at Haere-roa, additional access to Te Pataka advisors to enable earlier discussions about study choices and timetabling, and a revamping

of the popular Thrive lectures. These cover how to navigate the differences between high school and university, and how to succeed academically. UC Security is also enhancing community presence and patrols.

The Think First Summer campaign, the annual promotion of health and safety messaging for students and staff, is again being run during Term 1. The campaign objectives are to increase awareness of how students and staff can avoid potential hazards on campus, and to ensure students and staff know what to do, where to go and what support tools are available on campus for their health and safety. The programme is delivered via on-campus digital screens, social media, and online blogs and newsletters. It covers a range of topics including smoking and vaping, emergency procedures, entering or updating emergency contacts, the Assura health and safety app, UC Security services, the Help Point towers, and how to contact UC health and safety reps.

UC hosted a successful emergency management practice for the Canterbury region in January. This involved about 250 staff from the Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Civil Defence, Hato Hone St John (including approximately 40 “victim volunteers”) and UC’s Incident Management Team. The exercise was based around the scenario of an on-campus shooting. It was an opportunity for the organisations involved to trial and develop their systems, as well as a chance for further relationship building between the individuals and teams.

The Meningitis Foundation team is again joining with UC to help our students learn how to protect themselves from meningitis at the start of their university journey. The foundation has supported the University to partner with Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora to hold a vaccination drop-in centre. This is accompanied by an information campaign for students, parents, and whānau.

The Student Wellbeing team is overseeing a number of support services and activities for students in Term 1. These include drop-in sessions and activity-based sessions with Kaiwhakatere Oranga | Wellbeing Navigators, provision of a low sensory space, book clubs, connection sessions for adult students (in partnership with the UCSA), and a lunchtime “Connect Zone” for all students.

Staff and students are again taking part in the Aotearoa Bike Challenge. This involves bike riding throughout February, and connecting and competing online with others within UC or around New Zealand.

The annual round of the Academic Staff mentoring programme wrapped up in December. There were 36 academic mentoring partnerships in 2024, with mentors selected from a pool of 90+ Professors and Associate Professors. This programme has been run for 16 years and was commended in November in the “Excellence in People and Culture Category” of the 2024 Australasian Association of Tertiary Education Management awards.

People and Culture hosted a series of networking events for the Technical Staff Community of Practice in 2024. Over 50 staff have now engaged with the group, which was formed two years ago to connect technicians across the faculties, the majority of whom are in Engineering and Science.

People and Culture has also developed a UC Curriculum Basics online course. This is a collaboration between the Academic Quality team and the Capability and Wellbeing Team. Staff can learn the key concepts and basic functionality of the UC Curriculum Management application that is used for viewing curricula and for all curriculum governance tasks such as proposing, collaborating on, and approving new and changed curricula.

An online training module on Sensitive Expenditure has been released for managers and other staff in relevant roles, for example P-card holders.

Facilities Management organised a departmental barbeque with Mates in Construction, a not-for-profit organisation who delivered a presentation to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing and providing support in the construction industry.

Internationalisation – Locally Engaged, Globally Networked

Along with Professor Rajesh Dhakal and Dr Graham Wise, I travelled to India in late January to take part in the QS India Summit. Together with industry collaborators, Professor Dhakal presented a masterclass on University-industry partnerships across borders and I spoke on a President's Panel: *Addressing global uncertainties: Building resilient educational institutions*. While in India I also had discussions with H.E. Patrick John Rata, New Zealand High Commissioner, senior leadership of IIT Delhi, and the University Grants Commission and individual alumni. My final engagement during this trip was to present on the Global Vice-Chancellor / Provost debate at the PIE Live India Summit, where Vice-Chancellors of Latrobe University and Sussex University, and other senior university leaders discussed the current status of foreign universities in India under the industry reforms of India's New Education Policy.

In mid-January we welcomed 120+ students and teachers from China to take part in our summer Global Engagement short course, a two week programme for students from UC's partner universities to get a taste of life in Christchurch and studying at Canterbury. Students experienced activities from meeting the Mayor to working with UCE on smart city ideas, to dolphin watching and staying on campus at Tupuānuku. These students return home with the option to take up further study at UC through their respective university's partnership arrangement with us.

During 3-5 February we hosted the 3rd New Zealand Hydrogen Symposium 2025 on campus. The programme included keynotes from UC and New Zealand researchers and industry connections as well as keynotes from international colleagues from the UK, Australia, Italy, Germany, India and South Africa. Associated with the Symposium was Professor Rangan Banerjee, Director of IIT Delhi, who is a leading energy management researcher. He also met with senior UC leaders and visited a local industry collaborator, Fabrum. This visit continues a planned ongoing program of reciprocal research-focussed mobility activities between UC and IIT Delhi in broad areas of engineering.

During the lead up to Semester 1, many commencing international students have been met at Christchurch airport, which is the beginning of a welcome program that is designed to support the academic and social integration of international and domestic cohorts of students at UC.

Organisational Efficacy – of a sustainable scale by 2030

Audit NZ is currently on campus undertaking the annual external audit of UC's Annual Report for the financial year end 31 December 2024. The Audit process has progressed well, and the interim audit was largely complete before year end. The Annual report will be published on UC's website when this process is completed.

The roofing works at buildings on the Dovedale Campus continue at pace. Good progress has been made over the Christmas period. No changes to program are anticipated and budgets at this stage are forecast to remain within balance.

Construction of our new hall of residence, Tupuārangī, is progressing well with external consultants confirming delivery by 30 January 2026, that project budget is on track, and that the monitored quality of works on site is very good to date.

Work is underway to release UC Mobile to the Google Play and iOS app stores by the beginning of the term. Replacing UCGo, which is planned for retirement in March, UC Mobile will support students to better engage with their studies, and enhance the on-campus experience by providing personalised timetables, class/course information, easy access to learning resources and more.

The Risk and Assurance Team continues to develop, test and implement Protecht, UC's Enterprise Risk Management tool. Protecht will provide risk owners, senior managers and ARC with improved reporting and greater visibility and oversight of risks, ultimately assisting in the delivery of UC's strategic objective to improve and enhance organisational efficacy and reduce the need for paper-based and manual processing.

Environmentally Sustainable

Work continues on the Ground Source Heat Pump that will heat the Group 4 buildings which currently are Rutherford, Beatrice Tinsley, Rehua and the C Block lecture theatres. A Continuous System Operational Performance (SCOP) test commenced late in 2024 and will finish soon. The boiler conversion reached a completion milestone late 2024, and in January the final health, safety and compliance features were designed to ensure smooth and continuous operation.

A new module on Sustainability went live for postgraduate students, available through the Learn system.