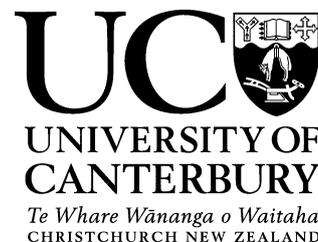


Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council



March 2025

Introduction

After welcoming students back on campus with various events, the academic year is now in full swing.

The newly appointed Tumu Tuarua Rangahau | Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research & Innovation, Professor Lucy Johnston, took up her role on 3 March. She returned to UC after nine years of extensive leadership experience in research and innovation roles in Australia.

On 17 March we hosted Minister Matt Doocey who announced a new Associate Psychology qualification with UC being the first to offer it. This will help expand access to psychological support and strengthen New Zealand's mental health workforce. The first cohort of at least 20 students is expected to begin studying in 2026, with graduates joining the workforce in early 2027.

Engagement

On 13 February the Reserve Bank of New Zealand – Te Pūtea Matua announced the appointment of UC's Professor Philip Vermeulen as a full member of its governing Board. He will serve for a five year term, from 10 February 2025 to 31 January 2030.

On 22 February we hosted the annual Alumni and Community Picnic and connected with families in the community over a sausage sizzle, games and music.

A UC Malaysian Community picnic was hosted on 1 March. The local Malaysian alumni and community were invited to reconnect over a barbeque. Over 80 guests registered for the event.

UC academics in collaboration with the Crusaders Professional Development Manager launched a four-week programme to help young rugby players balance university study with high-performance sport on 7 March.

On 16 March, I was delighted to be part of a 300-strong team of staff and students who participated in the annual City2Surf event in UC shirts. This annual Christchurch city event brings together thousands of people to have fun getting active.

On 18 March we hosted our Business and Arts Careers Fair and our Law Recruitment Evening. These events connect students with networking and job opportunities, provide exposure to various industries, support career exploration and professional development through workshops, and enhance brand visibility for employers. 21 organisations participated in the Fair, and 26 attended the Recruitment Evening.

Supporting our sponsorship of the Young New Zealander of the Year Award, UC leaders hosted two tables of alumni at the nationally televised New Zealander of the Year Awards on 20 March at the Viaduct in Auckland. AVC-Engagement Brett Berquist presented the award. UC alum Ben Philpotts-Scales and William Murrell (founders of KiwiFibre) were also finalists in the Spark New Zealand Innovator of the Year category.

Education – Accessible, Flexible Future Focussed

The first few weeks of university can be challenging for first year students. A significant effort was made this year to improve on the transition experience for first-time students at UC. Following an analysis of transition data from 2024, new processes were put in place. New initiatives included an online module that students could access before coming to UC, and a “one-stop-shop onboarding checklist” in every hall of residence and on campus. Pre-allocation of tutorials and workshops for first year students was also a “game changer” for staff and students.

All first year undergraduate students were sent a *Readiness for Study* survey. The survey asked students to self-report on a range of factors that are known to be predictive of student success. Nearly 4,000 students responded to the survey and the information allows first year advisors to proactively reach out to students presenting with risks to a healthy transition.

The importance of careers and considering it early was highlighted with the new and returning students. The UC Careers and Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) team engaged with over 150 students in the first two weeks. Students were seeking support in making informed decisions about degree changes and applying for graduate roles.

Career and workplace engagement was also a focus of several taught masters programmes. Several students continued their work across the summer with industry-related projects highlighting the contribution of our students to local and national industry. A group of over 100 Master of Applied Data Science students presented their projects. The group, many of whom are international students, worked closely with industry partners and presented on topics ranging from power sources in Aotearoa to gaming and volcanoes.

UC’s connection with industry was also evident in success of four of our geography graduates having been accepted as Graduate Planners at New Zealand Transport Agency | Waka Kotahi. Every year the Agency accepts 21 people who are provided with an opportunity to work in different parts of the organisation with a guaranteed position at the end of the programme.

The importance of careers and considering it early was highlighted with the new students coming into UC as well. The UC Careers and Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) team engaged with over 150 students in the first two weeks. Students were seeking support in making informed decisions about degree changes and applying for graduate roles.

While there is much discussion about technology and AI in teaching, there is still a strong focus on hands-on innovative teaching. Dr Kate Pedley, with support from the Facilities Management Team, has created a geological teaching rock garden outside the Beatrice Tinsley building. The garden provides a selection of rocks from regions across the South Island. This garden will enable students to practice practical field skills before going on major field courses. The design is an interactive solvable map, and it is one of only three known teaching resources of this kind that exist globally.

Research – Impact on a Changing World

A recent PhD graduate, Purawich Watanasukh, has been awarded the National Research Award: Excellent Dissertation by the National Research Council of Thailand. The thesis was supervised by Dr James Ockey.

HIT Lab NZ has been selected to showcase UC's contribution to New Zealand's research impact at the cutting edge of technology by Universities NZ in their 2024 Research Impact Booklet. This booklet gives a high-level snapshot of how New Zealand's universities actively contribute to growing and sustaining a productive economy and the knowledge underpinning our vibrant culture and diverse and inclusive society.

Rodrigo Dias Takase, game developer at HIT Lab NZ, was selected as an Emerging Fellow as part of the KiwiNet Emerging Innovator Programme and was awarded a grant of \$10,000 to further develop his idea, validate its market potential, and engage with the industry.

Dr Jalal Mohammed has been appointed as a research collaborator with the Centre for Ageing and Healthcare Management Research, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, for a three-year term. This collaboration aims to foster research and funding initiatives across the Asia-Pacific region.

Professor Michelle Bannister has been invited to join NASA's Near-Earth Object Surveyor Science Team as one of only 25 collaborators. Professor Bannister's expertise on small body surveys and the population properties of small bodies was acknowledged as being particularly valuable to the Team. The US\$ 1 billion NASA space mission will run for at least a decade and involves very few collaborators outside of the United States of America.

People – Nurturing Staff, Thriving Students

The Welcome Day free pop-up vaccination clinic, mentioned in last month's report, attracted nearly twice the student demand compared to previous years, thanks in large part to promotional efforts by the UC Communications team. Health New Zealand administered all the doses they had available for Meningococcal variants. A second clinic was provided by the UCSA as part of their Summer Starter event in week 2, and saw similar levels of demand. With continued support from Health New Zealand, further clinics will be provided later in the year.

The Recreation Centre has had a strong start to the year, receiving over 34,000 visitors for the first two months of the year, with approximately 21,000 of those visits from 10 February, when the students arrived back on campus. There are currently over 13,000 members, of which about 98% are students.

The month of Ramadan started on 28 February. The Student Wellbeing team has provided staff with an information pack about Ramadan and also guidelines about how best to support students during the period of observance.

People and Culture is offering a new Leading Change programme. This aims to equip leaders with knowledge of the effect of change on themselves and their staff, and tools to inform and empower staff during periods of change. There is also a group of 12 staff undertaking a bespoke eight-week in-house programme on project and change management coaching programme, applying their new skills to current work activities and projects they are undertaking.

The Graduate School is facilitating a staff programme entitled *Taking an Intercultural Approach To Supervision*. Over half of UC's doctoral research students are international students. In this workshop staff identify some of the nuances of working in an international university, as well as exploring practices that can be applied to research supervision.

UC's Chief Information Officer, Michael Oulsnam, was elected as the Vice-President for the Council of Australasian University Directors of Information Technology (CAUDIT) for a two-year term.

Health and Safety

The Director of Facilities Management facilitated a planning session with the Health and Safety team and specialists from the FM team. Planning is underway to refresh the H&S risk register, and to place even further emphasis on staff training and auditing.

A new Health and Safety Sub-Committee of the Senior Leadership Team has been established to create space for in-depth reports and focus on health and safety. The sub-committee had its initial meeting in February. The sub-committee will conduct regular health and safety observations across the campus.

Health and Safety trends during February and March included the below:

- **Environmental and Ergonomic Hazards:** These are mainly issues after the summer work break and unseasonably cold patches of weather in January. Issues are being responded to where appropriate on a case-by-case basis.
- An increase in reporting of **unsafe conditions** was noted with potential, but not actualised, hazards recorded. Examples of these include trip hazards, items stored in access ways, and items stored inappropriately. Additional communications have been directed to DSOs regarding access ways and removal of items in these areas.
- **Student seizures resulting in hospitalisation.** Two students had seizures on campus in separate incidents. Staff reacted promptly, calling security who attended quickly with medical staff and resulted in both students being taken to hospital. Staff followed up with both students following the event and they seem to be recovering well.
- Further to the **food poisoning event**, food safety management audit reports are due following unscheduled visits by an external auditor. Findings and recommendations from these will provide information on current performance and inform the next steps when establishing a regular audit. It is planned that all food service providers, both student accommodation and campus outlets, will be subject to food safety audits.
- **Health risk – timber dust in workshops.** Two areas of concern have been identified – Fine Arts and Forestry. The areas within both departments with identified elevated risk are being assessed, and respiratory equipment training and fit testing implemented.

Internationalisation – Locally Engaged, Globally Networked

A webinar *Rippling Politics in the Pacific* organised by the Pacific Regional Security Hub (PRSH), an initiative of UC's Macmillan Brown Library was held on 5 March. Expert panellists from the PRSH including UC Distinguished Professor and PVC Pacific Steven Ratuva and visiting fellows, Associate Professor Tess Newton Cain, Dr Levi Tavita and Lopeti Senituli discussed latest Pacific political events and implications on stability and security. The panel was moderated by PRSH lead, Associate Professor Jose Sousa-Santos.

In partnership with Australian Education Management Group (AEMG), on 12 March UC ran a Transnational Education workshop to advance our offshore joint programme development, familiarising Academics from Science and Engineering with offshore teaching requirements for the programmes.

Organised by the Chinese Consulate General, on 13 March UC supported the launch of a new Chinese student safety initiative. This brought together education providers and agents across the South Island to educate Chinese students on keeping themselves safe whilst studying in New Zealand, with a particular focus on preventing cyber crime.

On 3 March we officially welcomed our first 2025 cohort of Erskine, Canterbury and Cambridge Fellows and their families over morning kai. This semester we have 34 visitors coming from Japan, USA, Canada, India, UK, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Brussels, Ireland and Australia. Our faculty members have an opportunity to work alongside our visiting fellows and our students can benefit from being taught by fellows who specialise in topics such as ornithology, tectonic geomorphology, neurolinguistics and time series econometrics.

Organisational Efficacy – of a sustainable scale by 2030

The University is in the process of finalising the Annual Report for the financial year ending 31 December 2024. The Audit process has progressed well with no major matters arising to date, further updates have been provided to Council meetings during the process. The Annual Report will be published on UC's website when this process is completed.

On 13 March I visited the Tupuārangi site. I also met the Southbase leadership team who provided assurance that the project is on track to accommodate 283 first year students in 2026. With the addition of Tupuārangi, UC will increase its student accommodation capacity to 3,081 rooms, up from the current 2,798, providing more opportunities for students to thrive in a supportive and caring environment.

UC's new Student Mobile application was launched in February. This application will replace UCGO with a contemporary app experience that fully leverages the capabilities of modern smartphones whilst also allowing UC to develop deeper integration and personalisation for students. The launch experience includes student calendar, campus maps, emergency calling for security, easy links to call student support service providers and promotion of first year onboarding modules (Takatu). Releases later this year will provide deeper integration with LEARN (Moodle) to provide students convenience of receiving course notifications and ability see recorded lectures and events.

Environmentally Sustainable

The Postgraduate module on Sustainability developed by the Sustainability Hub has been widely released to all postgraduate students

UC's Director of Facilities Management, Keith Lilley, was elected as an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). *"RIBA Honorary Fellowships are awarded every year to people who have made a significant contribution to architecture but are not architects. Notable from the citation is that "Keith led the development of a sustainability reporting tool for the sector called the Sustainability Leadership Scorecard, now seen as a vital annual reporting toolkit for estates departments across the country."*

The Student Volunteer Army (SVA) Big Give annual flagship event - of which UC is a major sponsor - took part on 1 March. Over 340 students volunteered at the Red Zone's Corser Stream restoration site, mulching and weeding to support new native plantings in forming a riparian forest.