

CO-CHAIRS REPORT

4 May 2026



Kia ora UC Rugby whānau,

It is a privilege for us, as Co-Chairs, to present our report for the year. Reflecting on the end of the 2025 season and now kickstart to 2026, we are incredibly proud of the progress made across all areas of the club, and even more excited about what lies ahead.

Since stepping into these roles in July 2025, the focus of the club's leadership group has been clear, to build toward our long-term strategic vision of:

One Club. One Culture. One Purpose. Success Together.

That has meant taking the time to listen, set a clear direction, and most importantly, follow through with action. We came into these roles with a strong connection to the club, having both spent many years as players, coaches and contributors. That perspective has grounded how we've approached this year with a focus not just on performance, but on the overall experience of being part of UC Rugby.

A Year of Building and Resetting

The 2025 season saw UC Rugby continue to demonstrate its strength as one of the largest and most vibrant clubs in Canterbury. Fielding 13 teams across mens, womens, Colts, U85s and Classics grades is a significant achievement and reflects both the scale of the club and the strength of our player base. We are fortunate to be a club that is seeing numbers maintained and in key areas, growing. In particular, the strength of our Colts programme is something we all should be incredibly proud of. Keeping more young adults in rugby and in some cases, introducing them to the game for the first time is hugely important.

Whatever level you want to play at, we want to see you in maroon and gold. Whether that's pushing for Premier rugby, developing through Colts, competing in U85s, or pulling the boots back on in the Classics, there is a place for you here. But we do not take this for granted. Participation in rugby is under pressure in many areas, and it is on all of us to ensure the game continues to thrive. That means creating an environment where people want to be, where they feel supported, and where they keep coming back. Not just for UC Rugby, but for the strength of the game across our union.

On the field, performances were strong and competitive across all grades. Our Premier Men's and Women's sides both reached semi-finals, our U85s competed in a final, and multiple Colts teams progressed deep into their respective competitions, including championship success for the Taipans. We have also seen a number of players progress to higher honours across age grade, provincial, and professional environments. That is no accident; it reflects the quality of coaching, the strength of our pathways, and the standards being set across the club.

However, while we are proud of these results, we are always looking for improvements and ways to grow. We are building a club that competes across all grades, and celebrates successes together. Through our end-of-season survey, and ongoing conversations with players, coaches and members, we received clear and honest feedback. Facilities were under pressure, subscriptions were seen as high relative to other clubs, communication needed to improve, and while team cultures were

strong, the sense of a connected “One Club” could be stronger. That feedback has shaped much of the work undertaken over the past six months.

Turning Feedback into Action

We have been deliberate in moving from listening to delivery and ensuring that our valuable members can see and feel the changes being made. For the 2026 season, we have:

- **Restructured subscriptions**, reducing overall costs and simplifying the model to a flat rate. This was a direct response to feedback and a conscious decision to prioritise accessibility while maintaining financial sustainability;
- **Expanded our facilities**, increasing shed capacity from 7 to 10, an improvement that has already made a difference to the player experience;
- **Improved communication**, introducing regular UC Rugby Reports and strengthening how we connect across all platforms; and
- **Enhanced the club environment**, with a renewed focus on clubrooms, events, and bar offerings, making UC Rugby a place people want to be for their friends and teammates.

We have also been upfront about the realities of running UC Rugby. As a student-led club with no direct University funding, everything we deliver is funded through player subscriptions, sponsorship, and bar revenue. The reality is simple. This club runs because people contribute, whether that’s financially, through time, or through effort. Encouragingly, we are seeing the impact of these changes already. Preseason turnout was very strong, energy around the club is high, and there is a clear sense that people are buying in.

Culture, Connection and Pathways

If 2025 was about setting the vision, then 2026 is about starting to live it. We are seeing more players staying after trainings and games, turning up to support other teams, and spending time in the clubrooms. That matters. That is where culture is built. We have been clear in the expectations:

Show up. Back your teammates. Take pride in the club.

Our pathways are clearer than ever. From our Colts programme including teams such as the Cobras, Anacondas, Taipans and Constrictors through to Premier rugby, and with the return of the Classics (the mighty Tigers), we are creating a genuine rugby journey within UC Rugby. And it is not just about rugby. For many of our players, this club is their first connection point when they arrive in Christchurch. It is where friendships are built, support networks are formed, and confidence is developed, well past your years in the halls or at UC. In a time where young people are under increasing pressure, that role matters more than ever. The aim is to not just build teams, but continue to work towards building a community.

People Make This Club

Rugby clubs do not run themselves. There is a well-known adage that it takes over 1,000 volunteer hours to run a rugby club each year, and we see that reality every single week. We want to sincerely thank all members of our Executive Committee over the past year, our coaches, managers, and team staff across all grades, and the volunteers who give up their time behind the scenes. This club simply does not function without you. We also acknowledge coaches and managers who have moved on to new opportunities following the 2025 season (thank you for your contribution), and those who have stepped up or taken on new roles in 2026. This also extends to those players who have achieved higher honours at age grade, provincial, Super Rugby and national levels.

A special acknowledgement goes out to fellow co-chair Sophie Anderson for the appointment as Manager of Super Rugby Aupiki side Matatū, and Rilee O'Rourke for her outstanding work as Secretary and her progression into a new role within the women's space at Canterbury Rugby Union. These are achievements the whole club should be proud of.

Our Supporters and Sponsors

We are incredibly grateful for the ongoing support of the Old Maroons and the Maroon Trust. To our sponsors, both new and returning, thank you is never enough. Your support underpins everything we do. In particular, we would like to acknowledge our new major sponsor, Danny McBreen and Commercial Vehicle Holdings Ltd, as well as other key sponsors including:

- Bush Inn Tavern
- Quinovic Riccarton
- Duncan Absolum (Bayleys)
- Sports Clinic
- NZ Venue Co
- Powerhouse Wines

We also want to highlight the success of our Individual Jersey Sponsorship initiative. It has been a fantastic way to bring our wider community into the club and directly support our players for the 2026 season. We hope to get even more on board for the 2027 season, so stay tuned.

Looking Ahead

This is an exciting time for UC Rugby. With 143 years as a club, we continue to try and live up to the legacy and build something that respects our history while setting a strong foundation for the future. At the same time, our region is entering a new era, with the opening of a new stadium and continued growth in the game. So we press on, with a continued focus on lifting standards across the club, strengthening our culture and connection, building a sustainable and resilient club model, and growing participation and retaining players at all levels. We have a strong year of events ahead and are committed to making UC Rugby a place people want to be part of, both on and off the field.

This club belongs to all of us. Executive can work towards setting a direction, but it takes everyone to bring it to life. We are always after more volunteers and folks that want to help build something we all are proud to be part of. This is your club!

Ngā mihi nui,

Sophie Anderson & Justin Rafton | Co-Chairs
University of Canterbury Rugby Club