Research

Increase in PBRF submissions

The University met the deadline for Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) submissions with 35 percent more evidence portfolios than in the last PBRF round. The 932 portfolios submitted (up from 692 in the 2012 round) reflect the University’s growing research culture and its commitment to ongoing enhancement of research quality, quantity, and impact.

Landslide victory

New technology from a student-led research project aims to revolutionise the way geotechnical engineers monitor and predict landslides, potentially helping to save countless lives and cut costs. The project uses low-cost solar- or battery-powered wireless GPS sensors together with a unique, cloud-based algorithm to calculate the location of each sensor, enabling daily measurements to be taken at multiple points on a landslide without the need for site visits. Following a pilot in Taiwan, the technology is now being trialled closer to home in areas where landslides have occurred, including Kaikōura, the Kāpiti Coast, and Wellington.

Breaking the silence

In the first study of its kind, Dr Chris Bowden from the School of Education found that young men aged between 17–25 who lost a close male friend to suicide suffered, grieved, and eventually changed in silence. Dr Bowden conducted in-depth ‘lived experience’ interviews with young men over a period of a year. His research recommends that health professionals, families/whānau, and friends learn to acknowledge and interpret the silence of men in order to better understand their experience and need for care and support.

A boost for start-ups

A new partnership between Victoria University of Wellington’s commercialisation arm, Viclink, and New Zealand financial services company Booster highlights the investment potential in start-up companies spun out of the University’s world-leading research. The partnership, called the New Zealand Innovation Booster, was launched in August and will invest a minimum of $2 million per year for five years. It marks the first time a New Zealand financial institution has joined forces with a university to invest in its start-up companies.

Marsden Fund success

Twenty-two Victoria University of Wellington-led projects received more than $14.5 million from the Government’s 2018 round of Marsden Fund grants. The successful projects include a ‘waka laboratory’ utilising aerial drones and ocean submersibles to sample gas emissions from some of the world’s most inaccessible volcanoes, research investigating whether self-harm among New Zealand youth leads to suicidal thought and behaviour or vice versa, and a project that looks at how subtle genetic differences create diverse and useful chemical compounds in fungi, with a view to tailor-making compounds with medicinal uses.

Innovative endeavours

Eleven Victoria University of Wellington-led projects—a sixth of the total funded—received more than $34 million from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment’s Endeavour Fund. The University has more projects supported than any of the other institutions in the 2018 round of New Zealand’s largest contestable research fund, acknowledging the quality, innovation, and impact of its research.

Funded projects include materials for next-generation computers that use superconductor technology to increase operating speed and data storage, a magnetic sensor to test the integrity of infrastructure such as electricity networks, pipelines, and buildings (for example, after an earthquake), technology that uses solar-generated steam to purify water for drinking, and handheld biosensors for winemakers to monitor grape and wine quality.