Interview with the Chancellor

What are the Council’s top priorities?
We have been seeking to increase international recognition of the very high-quality teaching and research at this University. This is central to sustaining our long-term prospects. The Council also continues to emphasise enhancing the overall student experience as a top priority, along with increasing engagement in Wellington. My vision is that, in the not-too-distant future, Wellington is considered to be one of the world’s great student cities.

What has been notable about 2018?
The recognition of many of our world-class researchers in receiving distinguished awards and additional external funding to support their work has been outstanding and thoroughly well-deserved. We are proud of many student achievements and successes. It is notable that our students again took to the streets and voiced their concerns about real issues in society. Growing the University’s overall student numbers and achieving the 3 percent surplus required by Government are noteworthy in a challenging environment of fewer school leavers and a strong job market. As much as possible, we have endeavoured to reinvest funds into improving facilities, purchasing new equipment, and supporting the demand for accommodation. 2018 will also be remembered for the passionate debate about the name of the University.

Progress towards achieving the University’s strategic goals?
A range of new programmes and many new initiatives to build the employability of our students were implemented. More Māori and Pasifika students have enrolled at the University and we have provided increased support for degree completion. We have been delighted with the level of philanthropic support for the proposed National Centre for Music. The University’s digital strategy is well developed and is expected to deliver a significantly enhanced experience for students in the coming year and beyond.

What highlights stand out during 2018?
The Prime Minister opening our new Biological Sciences building, Te Toki a Rata, was a prestigious start to the year. Demonstrable leadership across academic disciplines was evident with such highlights as the critical acclaim for the Oceania exhibition, co-curated by staff member Dr Peter Brunt, at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, and the Royal Society Te Apārangi’s top honour, the Rutherford Medal, being awarded to Professor Rod Downey, the second year in a row one of our researchers has received this accolade.

How well positioned is the University for the future?
The University is doing an outstanding job of fulfilling the role society expects of universities—to provide quality education, produce impactful research, solve complex problems, inform public debate, and cultivate creative, social, and intellectual capital. The University must continue to strengthen its global reputation as a means to ensure high-quality international partnerships, recruitment of world-leading staff, and growth in international student numbers, international research funding, and philanthropic support.

Reflections on your first year as Chancellor?
It is a privilege to lead a Council that is eager for the University to perform to its potential, noting there are many challenges to this. Graduation ceremonies are a highlight—they are a time to reflect on our purpose and what we are collectively able to achieve. I enjoy seeing the delight on students’ faces as they walk across the stage knowing a new chapter in their lives is about to commence, or watching as whānau perform a stirring haka to acknowledge their loved one’s graduation on the University’s marae.

Who would you like to thank?
My sincere thanks go to Vice-Chancellor Professor Grant Guilford and the management and staff of the University. Thanks also to the student bodies, notably VUWSA, for their engagement with Council and management and shared aspiration for the University. Thanks to our alumni who support and engage with the University in various ways, and to all those who serve in a voluntary capacity on University boards and entities. I would like to acknowledge the leadership of our city, from Mayor to executives, for their commitment to Wellington as a great student city. I especially acknowledge my Council colleagues—a diverse, talented, and committed group of people dedicated to effective governance of, and having high aspirations for, the University.

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