Wellington UniVentures' 2024

IMPACT REPORT

2024

WE'VE HAD AN IMPACTFUL 2024 ...

41 CRA CONTRACTS DELIVERED

12 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES ATTENDED

30 NEW INVENTION DISCLOSURES

23% ENGAGED RESEARCHERS WERE FIRST-TIMERS

283 LIVE PATENTS

8 EMERGING INNOVATORS SUPPORTED

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WELCOME

Tēnā koutou

Wellington UniVentures' Impact Report is a moment to reflect on and celebrate the achievements of researchers from Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington who have brought their innovations to the world. This journey is not an easy one—balancing teaching commitments, publication deadlines, and the demands of commercialisation takes determination and passion. I deeply commend our academic colleagues who have taken this path with us.

At Wellington UniVentures, we are driven by a mission to transform research from Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington into world-class commercial solutions, forging lasting partnerships that have global impact.

It is particularly rewarding to celebrate the scientific leaders who have become co-founders of newly created startups. I also want to recognise those academics who have applied their expertise towards solving real-world problems in industry and Government; this year, we almost doubled the amount of commissioned research and advisory services.

Finally, ngā mihi maioha to my team for their dedication in working alongside these academic entrepreneurs—helping turn groundbreaking research into real-world outcomes for New Zealanders, here in Aotearoa and beyond.

Thank you all for your contributions and commitment.

Ngā mihi,

Pierre

Kia ora

It has been a challenging but positive year for Wellington UniVentures. Despite the subdued market conditions, the team worked with university staff to win $5.1m of external research funding, file 71 patents and oversee its investments in spin out companies. The spin out companies now have an enterprise valuation of $230m with our share valued at $7.2m. Together, these make a major contribution to Victoria University of Wellington's research reputation.

The research contracts secured by Wellington UniVentures in 2024 include major contracts with Ministry of Health, GroBiosciences, Zespri, New Zealand Health Ventures, IHP Therapeutics and BDG Synthesis. The new inventions coming through our commercialisation pipeline include exciting prospects in bio-health MRI development, anti-cancer treatment, Ag Tech and superconductivity.

We were pleased to appoint Pierre Malou as CEO at the end of 2023 after serving in an acting capacity while Anne Barnett was on parental leave.

The Board would like to thank Anne for her major contribution to Wellington UniVentures over the past decade.

I also want to recognise my predecessor, David Smol, who stepped down as Chair to join the University Council. David played a crucial role in shaping Wellington UniVentures' success during his six years of service.

Finally, I extend my thanks to our team, researchers, and stakeholders for their dedication during a challenging year.

Looking ahead, Wellington UniVentures is well-positioned to build on its momentum, strengthen partnerships, and maximise research commercialisation opportunities. I know that everyone at Wellington UniVentures is excited to be working with our researchers, partners and Victoria University to drive innovation and raise the University's research profile over the course of 2025.

Ngā mihi,

Mark

WHO WE ARE

OUR ROLE

We work alongside Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington researchers and industry partners to bring inventions and innovations out of labs and into the real world where they can make a difference in society. We also actively seek opportunities where University researchers can apply their expertise to help solve problems in industry or government.

OUR MISSION

At Wellington UniVentures, our mission is to translate innovative research into world class commercialisation solutions, forging lasting partnerships that maximise global societal impact.

In 2024, we came together as a team to create this refreshed mission statement, which outlines our collective purpose and the value we deliver to our partners and the University community.

OUR VALUES

Our values, also refreshed in 2024, guide our mission. They reflect who we are as a team and how we engage with our partners, stakeholders, and society.

INTEGRITY | Ngākau pono

We uphold integrity in all we do, operating with professionalism and unwavering ethical standards.

ADAPTABILITY | Urutaunga

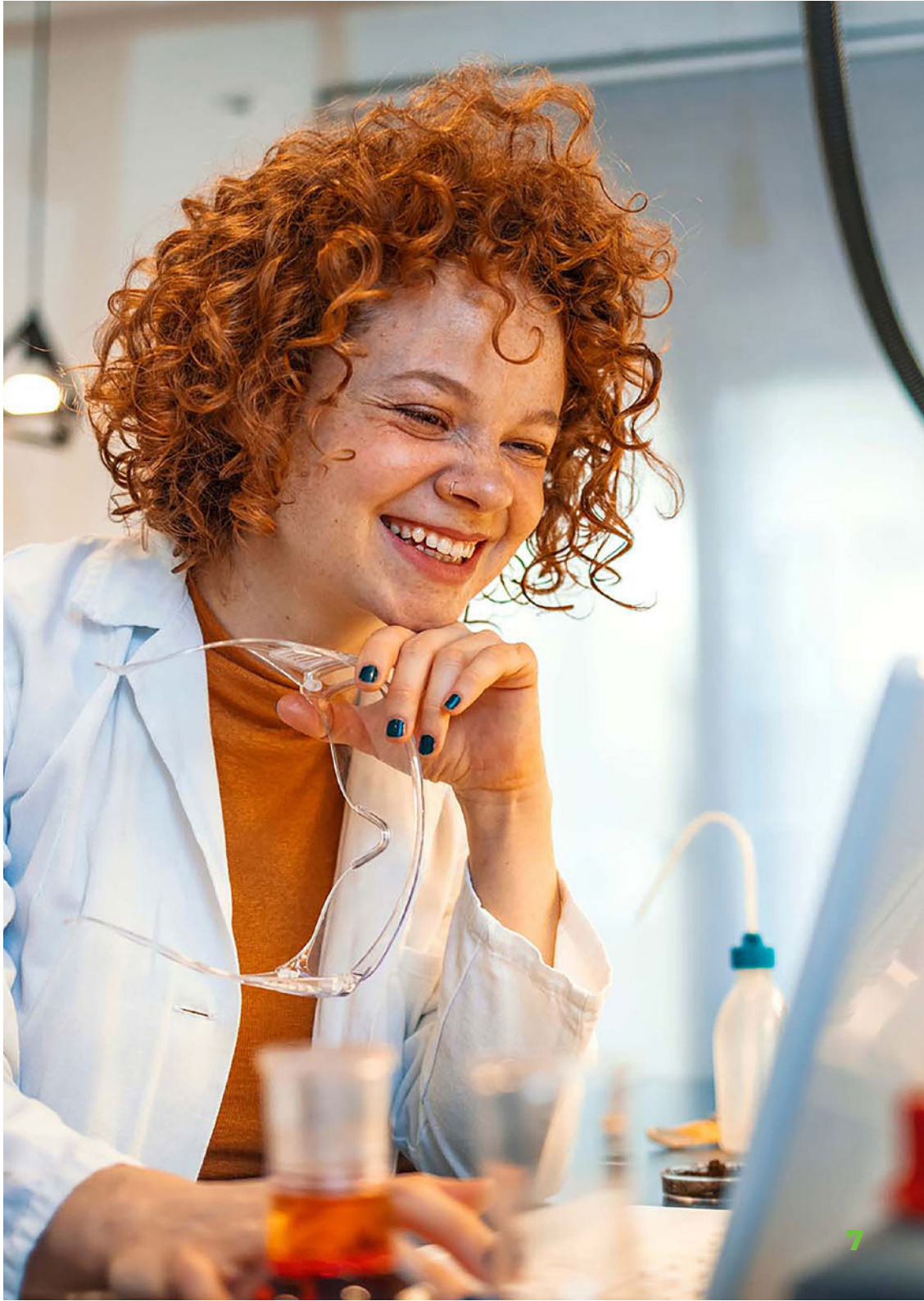
We strive to achieve the best outcomes, exercising agility, innovation, and resilience to tackle changes in our environment.

AMBITION | Whakaaro Arorangi

We think big and outside the box, tactically managing risks against opportunity.

COLLABORATION | Mahi tahi

We come together to connect our people, researchers, and industry to drive innovation and create impact.



OUR PROJECTS

Robinson Research Institute's success soars

In 2024, we were proud to continue supporting Paihau – Robinson Research Institute to make a global impact with its world leading superconducting technology.

We kicked the year off with supporting Robinson to secure record KiwiNet funding to bring its novel superconducting flux pump, which can power superconducting machines and magnets without contact, to market.

We were also thrilled to launch a new strategic partnership with Robinson and the UK-based company, HyFlux Ltd, a pioneer in advanced propulsion technologies. Our collaboration will apply superconductive technologies to one of today's most pressing challenges: zero-emissions air travel.

Robinson isn't limited to earthly success: the institute is also at the forefront of innovative space technology. Robinson has spent the past year preparing to launch its novel thruster technology aboard the International Space Station in early 2025. The landmark "Hēki Mission's" success could revolutionise electric propulsion systems, enabling more powerful and efficient space travel.

It's also been wonderful to follow the ongoing successes of OpenStar Technologies and HTS-110, companies founded on science coming out of Robinson which are becoming important players in the global fusion energy economy.

> **Robinson has an impressive history of transforming cutting-edge research into commercial success. This new partnership with HyFlux is set to be another game-changer, combining world-class expertise and a clear focus on developing global sustainable aviation solutions that can revolutionise the industry and be deployed in the near future to tackle greenhouse gases emissions.**

- Pierre Malou

Bontia Bio prepares for launch

One of our highlights this year was working towards launching Bontia Bio - an exciting new synthetic biology company that's harnessing the power of 'fungal factories' to produce natural and sustainable anti-parastic compounds.

Bontia Bio's first commercial product will be a non-toxic flea and tick treatment for pets. Bontia Bio's patented synthetic biology platform also has wider applications in human health and crop protection.

Beginning at Te Kāuru - Ferrier Research Institute, Bontia Bio was founded by Professor Emily Parker and Dr Matt Nicholson. Dr Taylor Hibbard and Dr Kelly Styles have been recruited from Ferrier as founder scientists that will continue to develop Bontia's technology and products.

Matt is a senior commercialisation manager with Wellington UniVentures, as well as a molecular biologist with over 20 years of experience in the field. As inventors of the technology, Matt and Emily have been driving Bontia Bio's commercialisation journey since its beginning.

To prepare for launch, the team participated in Sprout's Accelerator programme and attended the Kansas City Animal Health Corridor Summit Meeting, a two day event to help progress animal health technology.

Find out more

Nurturing Bontia Bio to a profitable exit is an impressive goal but ultimately, we want this company to carry on beyond us, and continue to do great things. There are so many opportunities beyond what we are showing we can do today.

- Dr Matt Nicholson

Animal vaccines set to get a boost through EVVE

Wellington UniVentures' senior commercialisation manager Jeremy Jones has been busy lining up a new venture which is set to have a big impact on the animal health sector.

EVVE (Enhanced Veterinary Vaccine Enterprises) uses innovative technology to design efficient, highly tolerable livestock vaccines. It could provide livestock owners low cost, effective vaccines for hard-to-treat diseases.

The science underpinning EVVE was developed by a talented team of Victoria University chemists, including Dr Bridget Stocker, Dr Mattie Timmer and Dr Emma Dangerfield, who continue to support Jeremy and serve as trusted advisors in the venture.

Founding this new venture is a good fit for Jeremy, who is a biochemist by trade and an experienced entrepreneur, having led and advised a number of biotechnology start-up ventures.

In 2024 Jeremy took part in Sprout's Accelerator programme to help progress the next steps leading to launch, including strengthening multinational partnerships, hiring the right people and securing seed capital.

Find out more

OUR PROJECTS

Commissioned research answers society's toughest questions

Along with supporting researchers to bring their innovations to market, we also have the important job of connecting world-class researchers at Te Herenga Waka with industry and government departments wanting to apply academic rigour to answering society's toughest problems. The calibre and breadth of expertise at Te Herenga Waka means it's no surprise that we've nearly doubled the output of our commissioned research and advisory (CRA) services in just one year.

Relationship manager Kartik Nagarajan works with researchers from across the University to help them secure and deliver successful contracts.

Kartik says, "Connecting people with opportunities is just one part of my role. The rest of it involves removing barriers to make it as easy as possible for busy academics to make the best possible use of their time by focussing on providing research and advice, not administrative tasks."

Among Kartik's successes in 2024 include his close and trusted relationship with Dr Mona

Krewel, senior lecturer in Comparative Politics. He's supported Dr Krewel on several important projects, including work for the NZ Defence Force on the social media landscape in NZ.

Dr Krewel says, "UniVentures and Kartik supported me all the way through the project, from providing the offer and calculating project budget to making the contract and doing the billing.

"I very much appreciate their support as a researcher, as this allows me to focus on the research side of things and not having to calculate RA costs or overheads."

"Doing commissioned research allows me to deliver research which is not only published in academic journals...but instead to produce research that has policy impact and thereby help to contribute to evidence-based policy-making in Aotearoa."

Dr Krewel also notes that the financial benefits of CRA work provides a constant flow of income to fund her other research activities.

Read the full story

EMERGING INNOVATORS

In 2024, we supported eight researchers through the Emerging Innovator programme. The programme, run through KiwiNet, teaches commercially-curious academics the language of commercialisation, equips them with skills in market analysis, IP and securing investment, and expands their professional networks.

Our commercialisation managers actively seek out Victoria University researchers who could benefit from the programme.

> **We're keen to support researchers who have a project or innovation in mind that they'd like to commercialise, but need to build the knowledge and networks to take the first steps.**
>
> - Pierre Malou

Dr Nathaniel Davies

Senior Lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington's School of Chemical and Physical Sciences

Working on a novel type of scholar cell made from perovskite materials that could revolutionise solar energy.

Ruohao (Sam) Sun

PhD Candidate

Using AI to speed up colourisation of line art drawings, by up to 50% so artists can focus on creative work.

Dr Adam Francis

Scientist at Robinson Research Institute

Creating a novel small, efficient superconducting flux pump that can power superconducting machines and magnets - helping herald a cleaner, greener future.

Newton Chan

PhD candidate

Developing a new technique for creasing metal sheets that would make liquid (aka 'blobby') architecture cheaper and simpler to build.

Dr Farah Lamiable-Oulaidi

Senior Scientist at Ferrier Research Institute

Applying world-leading chemistry research to therapeutics for rare diseases with no treatment, with a focus on Krabbe disease.

Da Jing

PhD candidate

Developing a novel technique to identify 'gifted' microbes that may be useful to humans, especially in medicine and agriculture.

Dr Bart Ludbrook

Senior Scientist at Robinson Research Institute

Researching how fibre optics can be used as sensors to detect and prevent failures in superconducting machines used in everything from fusion energy to space exploration.

OUR PEOPLE

Dr Albert Antolin Fontes

Commercialisation manager Dr Albert Antolin Fontes joined us in 2024 with a wealth of international experience in research commercialisation.

He holds a master's in biomedical sciences from Maastricht University in the Netherlands, and a PhD from IRB Barcelona where he researched gene translation.

After academia, Albert wanted to remain at the forefront of research so he joined Biomedical Research Institute Institut d'Investigació Biomèdica de Girona (IDIBGI), where he supported several projects to get closer to patients and market.

He's now applying his expertise to supporting commercialisation of research projects coming out of the Robinson Research Institute (RRI).

"I am extremely excited to continue helping researchers bridge the gap between research and its use in the real world," he says.

Read the full interview

Dr Kelly Styles

Dr Kelly Styles joined our team in 2024 on a special ‘researcher in residence’ internship to prepare him for his role as Scientist & Co-founder at Bontia Bio.

Kelly is an accomplished scientist who spent his PhD in Professor Emily Parker’s lab studying bioactive natural products in New Zealand’s fungal species - the science underpinning Bontia Bio. Before that, he worked at Biotelliga, where he helped develop natural agricultural crop protection technologies.

The internship helped give Kelly the skills and connections to become a confident entrepreneur.

“The most valuable lesson I learned during my time at WUV is the importance of being open and transparent, while also knowing how to strategically play your cards,” he says.

Read the full interview

Dr Emily Mason

Dr Emily Mason may be early in her research commercialisation career, but she’s already gaining a reputation as a positive force for change in New Zealand’s commercialisation ecosystem.

She joined our team in 2024 to support commercialisation of health technologies at the Ferrier Research Institute and the NZ Health Innovation Hub.

Emily’s PhD in drug discovery from Ferrier, as well as her experience running UniServices' Momentum and Return on Science investment committees makes her a great fit for the role.

Through her roles at KCA and Nexus, Emily is passionate about making the ecosystem a better place for other young commercialisation professionals.

“The idea is that we make things better for those coming in behind us,” she says.

Read the full interview

Sam Wojcik

Sam Wojick is one of our senior commercialisation managers supporting biotech and life sciences research. This past year, he’s been involved in two organisations - Biotech NZ and Rare Disorders Research Network - that are making a positive contribution to growing and connecting New Zealand’s commercialisation ecosystem.

In 2024, Sam was made Biotech NZ’s inaugural ambassador, recognising his leadership in building collaborations and connections.

He was also invited to the leadership group of the Rare Disorder Research Network to help influence and guide rare disorders research in New Zealand towards commercialisable outcomes.

Read Sam’s reflections

MEET OUR TEAM

Pierre Malou
CEO

Jared Scarlett
IP Manager

Julie Crisford
Head of
Commercialisation

Ben Dempsey
CFO

Lisa Bishop
Head of People &
Business Operations

Simon Wall
Senior Accountant

Kartik Retna
Business Coordinator

Catherine Liu
Legal Executive

Ela Romanowska
Senior Commercialisation Manager

Roger Zemp
Senior Commercialisation Manager

Mathew Nicholson
Senior Commercialisation Manager - Contractor

Shravanya Woopalanchi
Business Operations & Communications Administrator

Matias Kinzurik
Business Development Manager

Sam Wojcik
Senior Commercialisation Manager

Emily Mason
Commercialisation Manager

Jeremy Jones
Senior Commercialisation Manager - Contractor

Charlotte Henley
Senior IP Advisor

Kartik Nagarajan
Relationship Manager

Wayne Eltringham
Senior Commercialisation Manager

Albert Antolin Fontes
Commercialisation Manager

Adam Podmore
Senior Commercialisation Manager - Contractor

GET IN TOUCH

If you'd like to find out more about any of our projects, people or ideas, we'd love to hear from you.

Get in touch:

Pierre Malou

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Wellington UniVentures

pierre.malou@wellingtonuniventures.nz

Our commercialisation managers actively seek out Victoria University researchers who could benefit from the programme.

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