

## Guiding UHS Stakeholders Through a Critical Time

A world class research institution known as the Unitech Hortecology Sanctuary (UHS) is sited on the Unitech Campus in west Auckland. It's a lush 1.5 hectare (3.7 acre) area smack in the middle of the city's landscape. Internationally it had become a shining example of intensive, high production, urban organic agriculture. Experts far and wide have come to investigate its successes, and it's a local treasure to many Aucklanders—from beekeeping clubs, student groups, and even therapists. However, a critical moment arose when Unitech, facing numerous budget constraints, decided to cut site funding. How would this innovative facility keep afloat and stay operational?

*"Great leadership through a critical moment of the Sanctuary's history... Deeply appreciated."*

- Brendan Hoare, International Organics Expert and Co-Founder of Unitech Hortecology Sanctuary

*"A massive thank you for all of the work and effort put in to this. You've done a fantastic job and have kept everything going through rougher times such as the Christmas period."*

- Jo McIntyre-Brown, Unitech Hortecology Sanctuary Organising Committee



## Situation

Due to budget issues and curriculum changes, Unitech decided to discontinue its horticulture programme, and with it the funding for the Hortecology Sanctuary. The world-renowned learning center for organics needed a new lease on life and a new operator in short order.

## Challenge

Could an operator for the site be found in time? What would the transition process look like? How would the new operator meet Unitech expectations for managing the facilities on the campus grounds? How would numerous local stakeholder groups react to these changes? Could the site maintain the vibrancy, input, and involvement that had made it such a success?

## Solution

Across the holiday season, Forward worked with numerous community groups to identify challenges and concerns. We engaged a potential new operator that had emerged, and worked to build trust with other stakeholder groups. Liaising with Unitech, we developed key considerations for an operational and transition plan. Once all stakeholders were on board, we helped the new operator formalize the plan, and segued out of our facilitation role to allow the operator to begin the takeover.



## Evaluation

Within a few months, all details were finalised, the new operator Workforce Auckland championed as the new lease holder, community groups were exploring a new trust entity, and the general public will benefit from having this centre of excellence remain well into the future. Through our help, what could have been the end of a unique learning institution became a new beginning.

**Client:** Unitech Hortecology Sanctuary (UHS)

**Project:** Operator transition process

**Service:** Stakeholder management

**Industry/Sector:** Community/NGO

**Challenge:** Oversee and orchestrate multi-stakeholder management exercise to ensure new operational partner for UHS, with community and Unitech buy-in

**Results:** Working along the Sanctuary's founders, organics experts [Brendan Hoare](#) and Richard Main, as well as among numerous stakeholder groups, Forward helped:

- Understand the overarching concerns of Unitech in continued site use and develop a transition plan
- Coordinate the needs, concerns, and feedback of 20 stakeholder groups
- Create a management plan and proposal for Unitech
- Successfully support application a new operator for the site
- Ensure the site's ongoing operation

**For more information, visit:**

Article on Unitech Hortecology Sanctuary  
<https://www.unitec.ac.nz/unitec/2017/01/27/unitec-hortecology-sanctuary/>

**Contact Us:**

Chris Tobias  
Managing Director/Lead Strategist  
Forward Asia-Pacific Consulting PTE, LTD  
[chris@forward.net.au](mailto:chris@forward.net.au)