Unitec’s strengths lie in its applied and practical focus and its strong relationships with community and industry. In 2011 Unitec developed a procedure for establishing research centres; formally-constituted groupings of researchers who work together to collectively achieve defined research aims, including the transfer of knowledge to stakeholders.

The Environmental Solutions Research Centre (ESRC) was established in 2019 to foster transdisciplinary, industry-engaged research to tackle waste and pollution challenges. Founded initially by three researchers, today it boasts 22 members, internal and external to Unitec, and directly employs six staff. Its membership includes chemists, biologists, engineers, computer scientists, and building and construction experts, alongside industry experts from waste management and minimisation, air quality, wastewater treatment and civil engineering.

Meeting the global challenges of degrading environments, climate change and increasing greenhouse gas emissions requires new research and innovation. ESRC aims to respond to these challenges through an economic, social and environmental lens. Raising funds and finding partners to assist with complex and often controversial research is not easy.

Since its establishment, ESRC has submitted 15 funding applications for funding, seven of which have been successful. Another four are awaiting outcomes and two are pending submission. Funding requested to date has amounted to ~$4m, with ~$600k having been secured. Funding sources include local and central government agencies and industry.

Although securing funding from industry is sometimes seen as “easier” than applying to contestable funds, which are extremely competitive, it does require extensive communication and co-ordination with multiple stakeholders. The benefit though is that there is a direct transfer of knowledge which can affect changes to policy and standard operating procedures.

The technologies and innovations developed by ESRC will have significant impact nationally and internationally, through our overseas collaborators. The practical solutions ESRC are developing make the considerable effort to secure research funding worthwhile.