**Vets return to Tonga**

It was a welcome return to Tonga for Unitec’s veterinary nursing team. The team have been collaborating with the South Pacific Animal Welfare (SPAW) since 2013, taking a veterinary team to Tonga yearly to care for animals on the island.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic and the volcanic eruption in 2022 meant the team hadn’t visited the island nation since 2019

The trip is normally held in the first week of December as part of the Summer School course, says Academic Program manager Laura Harvey.

This year, a team consisting of 22 nurses, vets and students headed to the main island of Tongatapu for a week.

While there, the team worked tirelessly, spaying and neutering cats and dogs and treating other animals, including a few pigs, says Laura.

“Over the week, we did about 235 surgeries and 100 consults. The feedback from the students was very positive as had the opportunity to try out their practical skills in a concentrated time period. They also learned to communicate with clients who had limited English, and handle any unexpected situations that arose.

“The programme had significantly improved animal welfare in Tonga, but because of the three-year break, a lot of our work had regressed, she says.

“However, it also acted as a reset so that a veterinary nursing student is now collecting data as part of their bachelor’s project so we can track the effect of our work in the long-term.”

The collaboration has helped the School build long-lasting relationships with SPAW, which is doing valuable educational work in the region on animal care, such as vaccinations and deworming.

The trip is partly funded by Unitec and SPAW, while students pay their own way. The team also fundraises for the trip, and you can support them here.