

NEW ZEALAND (/NEWS/NATIONAL) / HEALTH (/TAGS/HEALTH)

## Anti-vaccine mandate protests: Victoria University of Wellington supports police tactics

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The police's cautious approach to the protest that is paralysing central Wellington (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/461471/wellington-s-sky-stadium-offered-as-parking-to-free-up-parliament-streets-blocked-by-protesters>) has the backing of Victoria University even though its city campus is now locked down and staff and students have been abused.



If protesters are physically removed, vice-chancellor Grant Guilford does not want university students and staff caught up in any stoush. Photo: RNZ / Angus Dreaver

Vice-chancellor Grant Guilford told *Morning Report* the summer trimester at the business and law schools next to Parliament grounds has been disrupted.

About 1500 students and 300 staff have been told to stay home and join classes online as protesters occupy their car park and camp on the front lawns.

He said some of the protesters are being abusive and physically intimidating.

"That sense of intimidation is deeply felt by our female students and staff and as a result we've advised them to stay away.

"We're also concerned that if the police do act and there is a physical removal of those protesters then that's right on our doorstep and that melee might catch our students and staff unawares.

"So we're just having to wait it out."

Professor Guilford said the university supported the police's careful approach to a complex situation.

He had walked around the crowd himself and observed some very passionate people who did not seem about to move on unless they gained some concessions or were physically removed.

"So quite a tricky situation."

A trespass notice has been given to police so they can use it when they see fit, Professor Guilford said.

"But we are determined not to act in isolation with the police for obvious reasons."

The main bus terminal is also closed, affecting students who need to travel from many parts of the city.



Trimester one is due to begin shortly, with 22,000 students potentially affected.

The university was taking extra security precautions for its property, he said.

### Backing for police handling of protest

Former government trade minister and ambassador to the United States, Tim Groser, who lives opposite parliament is praising the police's "gentle approach".

He described the protest as "extremely disruptive".

He said with 95 percent of eligible New Zealanders being vaccinated and broadly supportive of the vaccine mandates, it was impossible to understand how the protesters thought they could succeed.

He is strongly supportive of the police's mature approach.

"The only way to resolve it is how they are approaching it which is: don't set artificial deadlines, try and identify influencers and try to work towards a peaceful solution in the long run."



Some of the protesters in the grounds of Parliament yesterday. Photo: RNZ / Angus Dreaver

Groser said it was incredibly difficult to deal with so many disparate groups whom he described as "such a motley crew of far-right-wing Trump-type people and evangelical Christians" as well as gang members.

Some type of meeting with a senior government minister might be in the mix if a settlement was to be reached.

"Everybody should just be patient and back the police's gentle approach."

On a personal level, he said it was disruptive for his daughter who is finishing her masters degree but the protest was just a part of living in a democracy.

### Protesters infringing on residents' rights

Another nearby resident, former New Zealand Human Rights commissioner Rae Julian, is unhappy about the protest on her doorstep.

"I'm 80 years of age, I am an asthmatic, and I have no car. If I go outside, if I leave the building, I have to walk through the middle of protesters. There is no way of leaving this building without having to walk through."

"They're not masked, and it's likely that some have Covid. So, I don't think that it is fair. It is my right to be able to move freely around while at the stage when I'm not a close contact. I don't have Covid, so they're infringing on my rights as well."

Rae Julian lives directly in front of the occupied grounds of Parliament. Photo: RNZ / Hamish Cardwell

Julian said it did not appear negotiation with the protesters was making any headway.

She is also unhappy with children being at the protest site (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/461451/prime-minister-jacinda-ardern->





says-parliament-protesters-not-interested-in-engaging) and being encouraged to view the police as the enemy. One 13 year old she spoke to was unable to explain what the vaccine mandates actually meant.

Protesters have complained of their rights being trampled on. Julian's response is that with rights come responsibilities which must be balanced against each other.

The mandate that directs teachers, health workers and midwives to be vaccinated protects the rights of children in the classroom, patients and babies.

"It's a selfish attitude - my rights as against the rights of other people that they [the protesters] are practising."