

Ms C Tarrant
Chancellor and Chair of The Council of The University of Auckland
(via email)

8th December 2023

Dear Ms Tarrant,

We, the undersigned members of staff, are writing to urge the Council of The University of Auckland to provide immediate assurances regarding the safety of ourselves and our colleagues.

The recent hearing in the Employment Court between Associate Professor Siouxsie Wiles and the University of Auckland has exposed ongoing unsafe work conditions for University staff engaging in any form of public communication. (Much of the early media coverage was [collated by the Science Media Centre](#) on 10th November.)

In the absence of a court ruling, we and our colleagues remain exposed to psychological and physical harm while carrying out our work. As racist, transphobic, antisemitic and Islamophobic hate has been rising globally, we are particularly concerned for marginalised groups including Māori, Pacific, transgender and non-binary colleagues. We are also concerned that recent politicised conversation around gun control, free speech, and hate speech legislation, as well as public questioning of equity-oriented initiatives in University education (such as MAPAS), is likely to embolden fringe elements.

The staff risk intervention team (SRIT) was established specifically to support staff experiencing external threats, especially those of a gendered nature, such as experienced by Associate Professor Wiles. The evidence presented at the Employment Court has suggested that SRIT was unfit for purpose in AP Wiles' case, and we are concerned that it remains so.

We also note that the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Freshwater, mentioned in her evidence that she has been followed home herself. This is of considerable concern to us. We seek assurances that as a publicly visible woman, Professor Freshwater has received adequate assessment of, and support from the University for, her personal safety.

As immediate actions, we would like The Council of the University of Auckland to investigate whether the recommendations of the Quantum report *have* been put in place and if they have, whether they are effective and on what basis they have been judged to be so.

We also seek assurances from Council that you understand your responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act. Specific concerns relating to recent communications and events are listed in the appendix below. We believe that there remains significant risk of physical, psychological and emotional harm to our colleagues who work in fields of research politicised in the current environment, and that this risk of harm in the course of doing their work remains to be properly addressed by our employer.

We look forward to hearing from you as a matter of urgency.

Associate Professor Cate Macinnis-Ng, Faculty of Science
Professor Nicola Gaston, Faculty of Science
Professor Virginia Braun, Faculty of Science
Associate Professor Helen Petousis-Harris, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
Associate Professor Anna Santure, Faculty of Science

Associate Professor Bridget Conor, Faculty of Arts
Emma Sadera, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
Dr Debbie Hager, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences/Mātauranga Hauoraora
Anonymous
Dr Vanessa Selak, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
Anonymous
Dr Claire Meehan, Faculty of Arts
Anonymous
Dr Barry Hughes, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Dr Sam Manuela, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Dr Linda Rose Haultain, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
Anonymous
Dr Yan Chen, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (in solidarity)
Professor Frederique Vanholsbeeck, Faculty of Science
Professor Jacqueline Beggs, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Anonymous (in solidarity)
Anonymous
Associate Professor Rhys Jones, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (in solidarity)
Christiane Rupp, Business School (in solidarity)
Dr Sonia Fonua, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Dr Phyllis Herda, Faculty of Arts (in solidarity)
Associate Professor Peter Saxton, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (in solidarity)
Dr Kate Lee, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (in solidarity)
Emeritus Professor Joanne Claire Wilkes, Faculty of Arts (in solidarity)
Emeritus Professor Maureen Anne Molloy, Faculty of Arts
Anonymous
Associate Professor Sean Sturm, Faculty of Education and Social Work (in solidarity)
Dr Sereana Naepi, Faculty of Arts
Anonymous (in solidarity)
Professor Liz Beddoe, Faculty of Education and Social Work (in solidarity)
Anonymous (in solidarity)
Anonymous (in solidarity)
Dr Patrick Savage, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Anonymous
Anonymous
Dr Moeata Keil, Faculty of Arts
Anonymous
Dr Alice Della Penna, Faculty of Science
Associate Professor Karen V. Fernandez, Business School
Professor Andrew Jull, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (in solidarity)
Anonymous (in solidarity)
Associate Professor John Parsons, Faculty of Science/Faculty of Medical Health Sciences
(in solidarity)
Anonymous
Associate Professor Mhoyra Fraser, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (in solidarity)
Professor Paula Lorgelly, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences/Business
Briar Engel, Faculty of Arts (in solidarity)
Associate Professor Clare McCann, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Dr Bill McKay, Faculty of Creative Arts and Industries (in solidarity)
Associate Professor Dietrich Samuel Schwarzkopf, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
(in solidarity)
Kieren Lilly, Faculty of Science
Associate Professor Roger Booth, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (in solidarity)
Anonymous
Tane Pamatatau-Marques, Faculty of Creative Arts and Industries (in solidarity)

Dr Patrick Girard, Faculty of Arts (in solidarity)
Campbell Talaepa, Faculty of Science / Faculty of Engineering (in solidarity)
Dr Pat Bullen, Faculty of Education and Social Work (in solidarity)
Anonymous
Professor Melinda Allen, Faculty of Arts (in solidarity)
Dr Ritesh Shah, Faculty of Education and Social Work (in solidarity)
Anonymous
Anonymous
Inanna Haddon, Faculty of Science
Anonymous
Associate Professor Matheson Russell, Faculty of Arts (in solidarity)
Dr Sara Buttsworth, Faculty of Arts
Professor Neil Broderick, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Anonymous (in solidarity)
Dr Andrew Chen, Faculty of Arts
Finn Bellingham, Faculty of Arts (in solidarity)
Melissa Reid-Ellis, Faculty of Medical & Health Sciences (in solidarity)
Anonymous
Dr Ariana Andrews, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
Dr Bruce Floyd, Faculty of Arts (in solidarity)
Anonymous (in solidarity)
Jasmine Anderson-Baldwin, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Janine Wiles, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
Anonymous (in solidarity)
Associate Professor Bruce Cohen, Faculty of Arts (in solidarity)
Dr Hilda Therese Hemopo, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Associate Professor Rebecca Jesson, Faculty of Education and Social Work
Professor Peter James Adams, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (in solidarity)
Dr Rain Lamdin, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
Dr Persephone de Magdalene, Business School
Professor Jonathan Sperry, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Anonymous (in solidarity)
Dr Cushla McGoverin, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Anonymous
Professor Jay Marlowe, Faculty of Education and Social Work (in solidarity)
Professor Terryann Coralie Clark, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
Dr Elizabeth Peterson, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Emeritus Professor Michael Davison, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Dr Elke Pahl, Faculty of Science
Associate Professor Louise Humpage, Faculty of Arts
Anonymous (in solidarity)
Associate Professor Jennifer Lees-Marshment, Faculty of Arts
Java Grant, Faculty of Arts (in solidarity)
Anonymous (in solidarity)
Dr Laura Cobus, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Dr Tim Angeli-Gordon, Auckland Bioengineering Institute (in solidarity)
Sean Richards, Faculty of Science
Prue Taylor, Faculty of Creative Arts and Industries (in solidarity)
Dr Suzanne Woodward, Faculty of Arts (in solidarity)
Professor Jan Lindsay, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Dr Paul Michel Taillon, Faculty of Science (in solidarity)
Andy Hipkiss, TEU Organiser (in solidarity)
Dr Kiri Gould, Faculty of Education and Social Work (in solidarity)
Associate Professor Claire Postlethwaite, Faculty of Science

Anonymous

Anonymous

Anonymous

Angela Tsai, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences (in solidarity)

Professor Janet S Gaffney, Faculty of Education and Social Work (in solidarity)

Leila Boyle, Faculty of Science

Supporting Appendix

Communications and recent actions suggesting a conflict with the Health and Safety at Work Act

1. In an all staff email sent by the Vice Chancellor on the first day of the Employment Court hearing, Professor Freshwater stated that she wished to remind everyone “of the ways in which we provide support for staff to keep themselves safe”. This suggests that the university conceptualises health, safety and wellbeing related to our work to be our responsibility, rather than theirs. Yet under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, we understand it is our employer who has the primary responsibility to protect us from harms arising from our work.
2. In an all staff email sent by the Vice Chancellor on the 11th October, Professor Freshwater stated that in 2021 the University commissioned an independent safety and security audit and report (the Quantum report) which made a number of recommendations for reducing risk and keeping staff safe from external harassment online. She went on to say that she was “pleased to confirm that all of the recommendations have now been completed”. Yet evidence to the contrary was presented in the Employment Court.
3. We are concerned whether the recommendations that have been adopted are fit-for-purpose. As an example, one recommendation was to compile a list of at-risk staff, and the University’s Kings Counsel and witnesses spoke of this having been done. Another measure that was spoken of was the monitoring of social media for threats made against some staff, including AP Wiles. Yet while the hearing was taking place, this monitoring failed to identify that Voices for Freedom intended to hold a demonstration at the University and when Security were made aware, they failed to protect an at-risk staff member, leaving that person to fend for themselves while Sir Ashley Bloomfield was escorted from the venue.