



6 August 2022

Ti Lamusse

By email: [fyi-request-19880-44bae485@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-19880-44bae485@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Tēnā koe Ti

### **Official information request regarding ventilation in University buildings**

I refer to your request for information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) dated 11 July 2022:

*“Please advise me of the steps the University has taken to improve ventilation of University buildings, in light of the coronavirus pandemic, since January 1, 2020.*

*Please provide me with the total budget allocations for ventilation improvement since January 1, 2020. Please break this down to the smallest line item possible.*

*Please provide me with all advice and memoranda provided to the Vice Chancellor and Council regarding ventilation since January 1, 2020.*

### **Steps taken to improve ventilation**

The University’s initial response to the coronavirus pandemic following the removal of lockdown restrictions was a change to a remote working and teaching model. The subsequent reduction in the number of staff and students on campus meant that the University could continue to operate its campuses by adjusting its existing ventilation infrastructure and encouraging behavioural modifications by those remaining on campus.

Settings were adjusted to building mechanical ventilation systems to meet best practice advice and in order to efficiently ensure adequate ventilation. Natural ventilation was recommended where possible. Sensors (motion and/or CO<sub>2</sub>) were bypassed to allow fresh air intakes and air exhausts to run continuously. Fresh air intake and exhaust fans were also run at higher operating speeds than normal and return air loops in systems were externally vented.

Adoption of these changes resulted in a dilution of the aerosol particle build up that can occur in poorly ventilated space via increased air changes within the room. These changes, in conjunction with other practices such as physical distancing, encouragement of mask wearing, and increased cleaning regimes, have been in place since 2020.

### **Budget allocations**

The majority of ventilation improvements in relation to COVID-19 concerns were achieved via the operational changes outlined above, coupled with reduced occupancy levels. These changes required no additional budget allocation.

The University did choose to close down some practice rooms in the New Zealand School of Music where it was considered that existing ventilation infrastructure was not

sufficient to meet ongoing teaching needs until a mechanical retrofit could be completed. The scope and cost breakdown of this project are included in the attached document.

In addition to the above actions, some individual schools, faculties, or units undertook their own initiatives to improve ventilation in their areas (e.g. through the purchase of portable air filters or purifiers). Information regarding these initiatives is not held centrally and therefore cannot be made available without substantial collation and research. Therefore, provision of this information is refused in accordance with s18(f) of the Act.

### **Advice and memoranda provided to the Vice-Chancellor and Council**

The changes outlined above were considered by the University's COVID-19 response team and carried out by the University's Property Services team. Whilst the Vice-Chancellor and Council members were kept informed of risk mitigation strategies and initiatives through verbal updates, no specific formal advice has been located.

Please note, increasing ventilation capabilities was only one factor in risk mitigation in terms of the COVID-19 response. A number of operational recommendations and measures have also been employed to mitigate the risk of transmission on campus. These include:

- adjustment of occupation numbers for seminar/lecture theatres;
- recommendations issued regarding physical distancing;
- provision of COVID-19 testing facilities;
- adherence to Government regulations and guidelines regarding vaccines;
- requiring the use of face masks indoor settings, and encouraging use elsewhere on campus;
- introduction of dual mode delivery to provide teaching and learning in-person and online;
- increasing working from home capabilities for staff;
- enhanced cleaning and hygiene protocols adopted; and
- staff and students advised to remain home if they have symptoms.

We have also followed public health guidance and have implemented the public health controls recommended by the Ministry of Health.

The full COVID-19 risk assessment document that outlines the controls and mitigations undertaken is available at [https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/1985819/risk-assessment-covid-nov-2021.pdf](https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1985819/risk-assessment-covid-nov-2021.pdf). Further information related to the University's COVID-19 response is available at: <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/covid-19/index>.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of the decisions made regarding this request. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

If you wish to discuss this decision with us, please feel free to contact me at [oiarequests@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:oiarequests@vuw.ac.nz).

Ngā mihi nui

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