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Professor Ute Roessner
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Research Council

Via email to ceo@arc.gov.au

Dear Professor Roessner,

Confidential - Grant FT220100427

I am writing in response to [REDACTED] relating to the above Future Fellowship Grant (the Grant) awarded by the ARC to Macquarie University (the University).

As has been relayed to senior staff within the ARC, since receipt of the Notice of Suspension for this grant on the 12 February 2025, the University has been undertaking a series of actions. I hope that this letter provides you with a suitable written update on these activities and the subsequent next steps and indicative timelines.

On receipt of the Notice of Suspension, the University immediately suspended all activity on the Grant. The suspension builds on the decision by the University on the 3 February 2025 to implement a precautionary suspension of non-salary spending relating to the Grant.

The University is grateful to the ARC for its acknowledgement that a thorough examination of the issues raised by the ARC requires time. The University is moving as expeditiously as possible on the actions and investigations required. The University's activities can be broadly separated into two lines of activity: a detailed financial review and an assessment of possible research conduct concerns.

Financial management and expenditure review

The University has instructed a leading audit company to "conduct an investigation into all financial management and expenditure associated with the Grant". The scope of the review is to validate (or otherwise) that all expenditure relating to the disbursement of the grant was:

- Supported by evidence and has been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the:
 - Grant Agreement (*Commonwealth Grant Agreement* between the Commonwealth represented by the Australian Research Council and Macquarie University (Discovery Program – Future Fellowships for funding commencing in 2022));
 - Guidelines (*Discovery Program Grant Guidelines (2021 Edition)*); and
 - Relevant Macquarie University policies and procedures, including the Travel and Expense policies.
- Consistent with the approved project application.

The company has now completed its review of over two years of expenditure information and is currently preparing its report for the University. The report will address the scope and approach taken by the company, the results from their tests, and a summary of any exceptions identified during this review of disbursements of ARC funding.

Research Conduct

It is important to note that the investigations required by the ARC under the Notice of Suspension are being conducted under the University's research integrity procedures. This section of the letter sets out why this is the case and provides an update on the required investigations.

The Notice of Suspension contained information raising potential breaches of the *Macquarie University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (Macquarie Research Code) by an employee of the University. It was therefore necessary and appropriate to consider the matters raised in the notice under the Macquarie Research Code and its associated procedure.

On consideration of the information in the Notice of Suspension, the University determined, as per the Macquarie Research Code, that a Preliminary Assessment (PA) should be commenced. This means that matters raised in the Notice of Suspension are being treated as a complaint under the University's research integrity procedures. At this time, the scope of the complaint covers the areas referred to in the Notice of Suspension as A, B and C.

The PA has been allocated to an experienced Assessment Officer (AO) from the Macquarie University Research Integrity Office (RIO). The process for this PA follows the *Macquarie University Research Code Complaints, Breaches and Investigation Procedure* (Macquarie Research Code Procedure) (Clause 3.2).

The AO is currently collating and evaluating facts and information that have been obtained from a variety of sources. The AO identified certain facts and/or information which needs to be obtained from, or clarified with, Dr Abdel-Fattah as the Chief Investigator. The University expects a response from the Chief Investigator on or before 9 May 2025.

Some aspects of the complaint appear to relate to a specific qualitative research method proposed in the Grant Application. The specifics of this methodological approach requires external expertise to assist the University to understand the complaint within the applicable field of research and the array of possible methodological approaches. The University has identified suitable international experts and confirmed their availability to provide this assistance.

Clause 3.2(e) of the Macquarie Research Code Procedure requires the PA report to be considered by an officer of the University and a determination made as to next steps. The University is seeking the experts' report as soon as possible. However, as the ARC would appreciate, the timing of the report is subject to other commitments of the experts. As further information becomes available, the University will provide the ARC with an expected date for the experts' report.

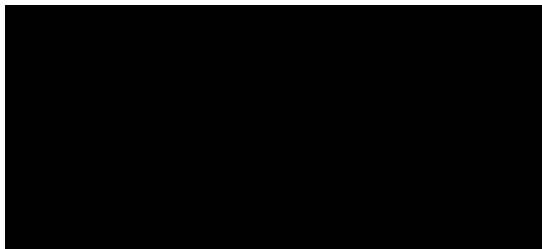
Confidentiality

As the ARC will appreciate, confidentiality in research integrity matters is of central importance to the process. However, the University also appreciates that it has obligations under the Grant Agreement following the Notice of Suspension and the ARC's requirement for investigations to be conducted.

While the Macquarie Research Code and Macquarie Research Procedure are publicly available documents, other information in this letter regarding the PA and steps taken to date are strictly confidential and has been provided to the ARC both as an update to steps taken following the Notice of Suspension and on the basis that the ARC is the complainant in the research integrity process. The University asks that the ARC does not disclose the information in this letter to any other person.

The University is conscious that there has been significant public interest in this matter. The University would be happy to discuss what information may be able to be publicly discussed in the context of our respective privacy and confidentiality obligations, should that assist the ARC.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Sakkie Pretorius
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Macquarie University