



Redactions applied section 47F personal privacy

Wednesday 12 February 2025

Professor Sakkie Pretorius
Deputy Vice Chancellor – Research
Macquarie University
NSW 2109

By email to: [REDACTED]

Dear Prof Pretorius

Notice of Suspension – Macquarie University Grant FT220100427

1. Thank you for taking the time to meet with myself and senior members of the ARC via Microsoft Teams on 4 February 2025 regarding the ARC's enquiries into the management of the research project for which Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah is the Chief Investigator. I have advised the Chair of the ARC Board that Macquarie University is cooperating fully with the ARC.
2. Thank you also for communicating to the ARC on 3 February 2025 that Macquarie University has taken steps to suspend non-salary spending relating to the Grant in question. This action, undertaken by the university as the administering organisation, indicates the seriousness of the matter.
3. As foreshadowed during the meeting on 4 February 2025, it is available to the ARC to suspend Grant FT220100427 (**Grant**) to enable the ARC to satisfy itself that the Grant is being appropriately managed. The ARC is taking such action and this notice formalises the suspension and provides details as to its scope and basis. The Chair of the ARC Board has been briefed and supports this course of action.
4. In this context, I refer to:
 - a. the Commonwealth Grant Agreement for the Discovery Program between the Commonwealth of Australia represented by the Australian Research Council (**ARC**) and Macquarie University, created on 29 September 2022 (**Grant Agreement**);
 - b. the Grant, which is administered under the Grant Agreement;

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- c. your email to the ARC dated 2 December 2024;
- d. Dr Ross McLennan's, email to the ARC dated 3 February 2025;
- e. The aforementioned meeting held via Microsoft Teams on 4 February 2025 between the ARC and Macquarie University; and
- f. the site visit conducted by two Senior Executive Service officers from the ARC, with yourself, [REDACTED], and Dr Ross McLennan, from Macquarie University, at Macquarie University's North Ryde campus on 5 February 2025 (**Site Visit**).

Suspension

5. The ARC believes there are serious concerns relating to compliance with the Grant Agreement in respect of the Grant (including those described further below) that require one or more investigations to be undertaken. Accordingly, the ARC issues this notice of suspension pursuant to clause 35.2.2 of the Grant Agreement.
6. Subject to this notice, the ARC directs that Macquarie University immediately suspend further performance of the Activity (as defined in the Grant Agreement) in relation to the Grant (**Suspension**).
7. The Suspension will remain in effect until the ARC issues a further written notice to Macquarie University, directing that the Activity is to recommence in accordance with the Grant Agreement, or the Grant comes to an end (including, potentially, by our exercise of further rights under the Grant Agreement).
8. For clarity:
 - a. by this notice, Macquarie University is directed to suspend all activity related to the Grant, including all expenditure of Grant funds;
 - b. during the Suspension, the ARC will withhold all further payments of previously approved Grant funds;
 - c. Macquarie University may, despite the Suspension, perform specific parts of the Activity that fall under the Suspension only if the ARC provides prior, express, written approval;
 - d. the Suspension applies irrespective of any suspension or similar activities that Macquarie University might itself have implemented, or might implement in the future;
 - e. the Suspension does not extend or apply to any other grants given or administered under the Grant Agreement and their Activities that are not Grant FT220100427 (**Other Grants**);

- f. Macquarie University must continue to comply with its obligations under the Grant Agreement in respect of the Other Grants;
- g. Macquarie University must continue to comply with its obligations under the Grant Agreement in relation to the Grant and the Activity that do not amount to performance of the Activity (e.g. reporting to the ARC, and providing information as requested by the ARC, in accordance with the Grant Agreement); and
- h. the ARC reserves all of its rights under the Grant Agreement, including to exercise further rights under the Grant Agreement while the Suspension is in effect.

Serious Concerns

A. Application of ARC-Supplied Grant Funds

- 9. On 30 January 2025, *The Australian* reported that Dr Abdel-Fattah made the following statement at the Queensland University of Technology’s National Symposium on Unifying Anti-Racist Research and Action held on 23–24 January 2025 (**QUT Symposium**):
 - I look for ways to bend rules, and refuse and subvert them...
 - Part of my funding is to hold a traditional academic conference, and I thought, “No, I’m not going to do that...”
- 10. These statements could be interpreted as suggesting that Grant funding provided by the ARC to Macquarie University in relation to research to be conducted by Dr Abdel-Fattah is potentially being consciously applied in a manner that is not consistent with the purposes for which that funding was provided.
- 11. During the Site Visit, the ARC’s representatives made enquiries in relation to the processes that Macquarie University has in place to manage and ensure Grant funds are applied for the purposes for which they were provided. Macquarie University’s representatives spoke broadly about the university’s financial management practices in relation to ARC-funded grants. Macquarie University was not, at that time, in a position to fully demonstrate to the ARC what specific systems and processes it has in place to manage the Grant, and as a result, confirm that all Grant funds have been applied in accordance with the approved project scope. The ARC therefore considers it necessary and appropriate to afford Macquarie University sufficient time to take steps to demonstrate this.
- 12. The Grant Agreement requires that:
 - a. Macquarie University ensures that the project described in the Grant Offer is implemented in accordance with the Grant Agreement, and within the broad structure of the proposed ‘Project Cost’ contained in the application (cl A2.2.1);

- b. Grant funds only be used for eligible expenditure items as set out in the Grant Guidelines (cl A2.2.2(b)) (which includes a requirement that the Grant can only be spent on eligible expenditure items that directly support the project);
 - c. Macquarie University monitor the expenditure of Grant funds (cl 20.1); and
 - d. if Macquarie University's Responsible Officer holds an opinion that Grant funds are not being expended in accordance with the Grant Agreement, Macquarie University must take all action necessary to minimise further expenditure in relation to the project and inform the ARC immediately (cl 20.1).
13. On 3 February 2025, Dr Ross McLennan sent an email to the ARC citing clause 20.1 of the Grant Agreement and advising that Macquarie University will suspend non-salary expenditure in relation to the Grant. Dr McLennan's email stated Macquarie University 'do[es] not have any evidence of any misconduct or issues with performance of this project'. Nevertheless, Dr McLennan's sending of this notice under clause 20.1 indicates that Macquarie University holds an opinion that ARC-supplied funding may not have been applied consistently with the Grant Agreement.
14. The reported comments made by Dr Abdel-Fattah, together with the fact that Macquarie University has taken this course of action, are of serious concern to the ARC. In this context, the ARC further considers it important for Macquarie University to demonstrate its processes and procedures for managing the Grant (including the nature and the purpose of all expenditure).

In the light of the above, the ARC requires Macquarie University to:

- A.1 Engage a company registered as a registered company auditor with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission to conduct an investigation into all financial management and expenditure associated with the Grant, from the Activity's commencement, to:
- a. evidence and confirm that all expenditure has been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Grant Agreement (including that all expenditure has been consistent with the approved project application);
 - b. evidence and confirm that all Grant funding has otherwise been appropriately monitored and managed in accordance with the Grant Agreement's requirements; and
 - c. identify what (if any) expenditure and/or management of Grant funding has not been undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Grant Agreement, and on what basis.

A.2 Provide to the ARC a copy of the report detailing the investigation, including its methodology, evidence considered, and findings.

B. Research Integrity in Relation to Scope of Academic Research

15. On 30 January 2025, *The Australian* reported that Dr Abdel-Fattah made the following statement at the QUT Symposium:

I refuse to cite anybody who has remained silent over Gaza, no matter how authoritative and big they are in their respective fields. If they have remained silent, they are not scholars to me, they are not thinkers, they are deficient human beings. I will not participate in validating them.

16. The Grant Agreement requires that:

- a. Macquarie University, its Specified Personnel, and Participating Organisations, collect and maintain research data in accordance with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018 (Research Code)* (cl A2.2.5); and
- b. projects must, unless otherwise approved by the ARC in writing, conform to the principles outlined in the Research Code (and I note that the ARC has no record of providing an approval in respect of the Grant under this part of the Grant Agreement) (cl 23.7).

17. As Macquarie University is aware, the Research Code establishes a framework for responsible research conduct through its principles. Relevantly, those principles establish three core requirements in relation to research integrity, which stated broadly, are:

- a. citing and acknowledging the work of others in research;¹
- b. avoiding or otherwise appropriately managing risks of bias in relation to research;² and
- c. demonstrating appropriate respect for researchers and their research.³

18. Dr Abdel-Fattah's statement leads the ARC to hold serious concerns as to the possibility that research supported by the Grant may not being conducted in accordance with the Research Code, and as a result, not being conducted consistently with the Grant Agreement.

19. To date, the ARC has not had sufficient visibility of any steps that Macquarie University has previously taken, or is currently undertaking, to ensure the integrity of the research being under the Activity. Accordingly, the ARC is not in a position to be satisfied

¹ See eg, principles P1, P4, P8, R7, R23, R26, R27.

² See eg, principles P2, P3, R24.

³ See eg, principles P1, P2, P4, R22, R26, R27.

regarding these concerns in the light of this most recent statement reportedly made by Dr Abdel-Fattah.

In the light of the above, the ARC requires Macquarie University to:

B.1 Conduct an investigation into the integrity of the research conducted under the Grant, to:

- a. confirm if it has been conducted in accordance with the Research Code, and the Grant Agreement more generally; and
- b. identify what (if any) aspects of the research has not been conducted in accordance with the Research Code and the Grant Agreement, and on what basis.

B.2 Provide to the ARC a copy of the report detailing the investigation, including its methodology, evidence considered, and findings.

C. Conflicts of Interest

20. The Grant Agreement requires that Macquarie University:

- a. ensure that projects are implemented in accordance with the Grant Agreement, and substantially in accordance with the 'Project Description'... contained in the application (cl A2.2.1);
- b. ensure that appropriate ethics clearances are in place before parts of a project that require ethical clearances commence (cl A2.1.2);
- c. make proper enquiries of the Specified Personnel in relation to their conflicts of interest and eligibility to perform their role in the project (cl A2.2.6(a));
- d. ensure that all parties involved in the project disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest which have the potential to influence, the research and activities of the project, publications and media reports, or requests for funding related to the project (cl 10.1); and
- e. if it becomes aware of any actual or potential conflicts of interest relating to parties involved in the project:
 - i. have documented and established processes in place for managing the actual or potential conflict of interest for the duration of the project, which must comply with the Research Code and the *ARC Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy 2020* (cl 10.2(a)); and

- ii. notify the ARC in accordance with the Research Policy of any preliminary assessment or investigation into potential breaches of the Research Code that are related to conflicts of interest (cl 10.2(b)); and
 - iii. otherwise notify the ARC (cl 10.3(a)).
21. The application for the Grant describes the project as being a study of:
- a neglected but constitutive part of Australia's social movement history: Arab/Muslin Australian social justice activism. It aims to recover previously untapped oral histories and rare archival collections of Arab/Muslim Australian activities working in anti-racism, anti-war and feminist social movements from the 1970s to date.
22. During 2024 and up to the date of this notice, Dr Abdel-Fattah made a significant number of widely publicised statements in relation to contemporary geopolitical events.⁴ Media outlets also have reported that on 26 April 2024, Dr Abdel-Fattah led a protest at the University of Sydney and involved children in that protest.
23. The ARC acknowledges that researchers are and should be free to voice their own political views and to undertake lawful activities in a personal capacity in furtherance of those political views. In particular circumstances, however, a significant risk of a conflict of interest may arise if a researcher is engaging in political activism in the same, or an area that overlaps with, the area that they are (publicly funded) to research.⁵
24. In such cases, noting the challenges that may arise in clearly separating the researcher's personal interests from their research, it is anticipated that well-developed, robust, and proactive management strategies need to be applied by the responsible administering organisation to manage conflict of interest risks.
25. On 12 November 2024, I wrote to Macquarie University seeking:
- a. information from Macquarie University about the extent to which Dr Abdel-Fattah's attendance at the protest at the University of Sydney related to the Grant or the Activity; and
 - b. confirmation and assurances as to whether appropriate ethics and other approvals were in place.
26. By an email from yourself in response dated 2 December 2024, you advised that:
- Dr Abdel Fattah attended the protest at the University of Sydney campus, which included children, in a private capacity. This activity was not part of, or in any way linked, to the

⁴ We do not reproduce any of those statements in this notice. However, we note that as at the date of this notice, many of those statements are readily accessible on Dr Abdel-Fattah's X and Instagram social media platforms. Those platforms also contain other statements that Dr Abdel-Fattah herself has either commented on, or 'shared'.

⁵ See, [ARC Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policy](#) section 2.2.

research project funded by the ARC nor included in any ethics application submitted to Macquarie University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

27. The ARC has subsequently come to understand that this conclusion was primarily based on a representation by Dr Abdel-Fattah herself. Noting that the protest occurred on a Friday (i.e., a conventional working day), the ARC considers that objective evidence, beyond self-declaration, would be necessary to enable a conclusion that there was in fact no link between the protest and the Activity. Macquarie University has not provided information to the ARC's satisfaction that it had at the time, or now has, well-developed, robust, and proactive management strategies in place to manage conflict of interest risks.
28. These factors lead the ARC to hold concerns that, despite the requirements under the Grant Agreement:
 - a. the Activity might be affected by one or more conflicts of interest (including, potentially, perceived conflicts of interest); and/or
 - b. there may not be appropriate or sufficient management strategies (including conflict of interest and/or ethics frameworks) in place to manage such conflicts of interest, if they do exist.

In the light of the above, the ARC requires Macquarie University to:

- C.1 Advise what conflicts of interest Dr Abdel-Fattah has declared in relation to the Grant, and when she last made a conflict of interest declaration.
- C.2 Advise and provide evidence regarding the steps Macquarie University has implemented to manage any conflicts of interest that Dr Abdel-Fattah disclosed (and how it continues to implement those strategies).
- C.3 Advise and provide evidence regarding the steps Macquarie University is taking to consider and manage risks associated with conflicts of interest for Dr Abdel-Fattah independently of any declarations that she may or may not make.
- C.4 If Macquarie University believes:
 - a. that Dr Abdel-Fattah might have one or more conflicts of interest that have not been declared, or are otherwise not being actively managed by Macquarie University – investigate whether Dr Abdel-Fattah has one or more conflicts of interest, and if she is found to, identify appropriate measures to manage the conflict of interest, and provide to the ARC a copy of the report detailing the investigation and its findings; or

b. that Dr Abdel-Fattah does not have any conflicts of interest that have not been declared, or that otherwise do not require active management by Macquarie University, provide a detailed explanation of the bases upon which Macquarie University has reached this view.

C.5 Confirm, and provide evidence of, the bases on which Macquarie University concludes that Dr Abdel-Fattah attended the protest in a personal capacity. This might include, for example, written communications between Dr Abdel-Fattah and Macquarie University before the protest activity occurred on 26 April 2024, in which Dr Abdel-Fattah advised that she would attend the protest in a personal capacity.

C.6 As an alternative to C.5, if Macquarie University now holds doubts as to whether Dr Abdel-Fattah did in fact attend the protest in a personal capacity, conduct an investigation into this, and provide to the ARC a copy of the report detailing the investigation, including its methodology, evidence considered, and findings.

C.7 Provide copies of all documentation setting out the principles and management strategies previously applied, and currently being applied, by Macquarie University in respect of:

- a. Dr Abdel-Fattah's attendance at protests, events of a political nature, and other events that might present perception or reputational risks, in connection with the Activity; and
- b. balancing and managing interactions between the Activity and Dr Abdel-Fattah's private interests.

Other Matters

Provision of Updated Grant Documents

The ARC understands that there has been at least one variation to the Activity that the ARC was not notified of.

To enable the ARC to properly consider this matter, and ensure that it is having regard to the Grant and the Activity in the form that Macquarie University understands it to be, the ARC requires that Macquarie University provide:

D.1 copies of documentation setting out all variations or other changes to the Grant or the Activity (including to the Activity's ethics plan(s)) that were not reported, or have otherwise not been previously provided, to the ARC

(either because the variation was not considered significant enough to require notification under the Grant Agreement, or otherwise);

- D.2 an explanation of the process that was followed to implement the variations in relation to which documentation is provided under D.1;
- D.3 a copy of the risk management plan for the Activity (including all variations, updates, and additional plans to manage risk, throughout the duration of the Grant);
- D.4 a copy of the ethics plan for the Activity (including all variations, updates, and additional plans relating to ethics management, throughout the duration of the Grant)
- D.5 a copy of all ethics approvals and clearances for the Activity (including all variations, updates, and additional approvals or clearances, throughout the duration of the Grant); and
- D.6 a copy of the data management plan for the Activity (including all variations, updates, and additional plans relating to data management, throughout the duration of the Grant).

Completion of Actions

Through this notice, and pursuant to the Grant Agreement, the ARC requires Macquarie University to undertake a number of actions.

Under the Grant Agreement, it is open to the ARC to specify a time within which such actions must be completed. The ARC is open to hearing from Macquarie University as to what timeframe it considers it may require to complete these actions. Accordingly, the ARC reserves the right to specify a timeframe until after it has heard from Macquarie University.

Further Enquiries

I note that this matter has given rise to what may amount to additional concerns for the ARC. The ARC is in the process of considering these, and it may be that the ARC will require Macquarie University to answer further questions, provide further information, and/or undertake additional activities. In this regard, the ARC will be in contact with Macquarie University in due course.

Further Remarks

I acknowledge and appreciate that Macquarie University has taken steps to engage with the ARC productively in relation to the Grant in the light of recent developments and that this Grant is one of many ARC-funded projects that Macquarie University administers.

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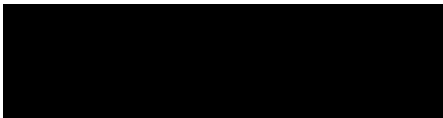
I further acknowledge that, at a general level, the ARC has not to-date experienced significant concerns in relation to other ARC-funded projects administered by Macquarie University.

The ARC is issuing this notice, and making its enquiries in relation to the Grant, consistently with its functions under, and the objects of, the *Australian Research Council Act 2001* (Cth).

The ARC is committed to working productively with Macquarie University in relation to this matter, and the administration of ARC-funded projects generally.

The ARC reserves all of its rights in respect of this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Richard Johnson
Acting Chief Executive Officer