

RESEARCH INTEGRITY

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[REDACTED]
Director, Research Security and Integrity

Australian Research Council (ARC)

researchIntegrity@arc.gov.au

7 May 2025

Macquarie University: Research Integrity Notification to ARC

Case Information and Notification Type	
MQ Reference	RI2504
ARC Project ID (if relevant)	Grant FT220100427
Name and Role of the Researcher	Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah ARC Future Fellow
Complainants	1) Australian Research Council (ARC) [REDACTED]
Type of Notification	Macquarie University is reporting the matter to the ARC Research Integrity unit prior to the completion of a preliminary assessment because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. matters were referred to Macquarie University by the ARC. ii. funding has been suspended by the ARC. iii. the preliminary assessment is expected to take longer than 12 weeks from the date of receipt of the complaints.
MQ Contacts	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Notification Details	
Outline of Complaint / allegation	On 12 February 2025, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research of Macquarie University received a Notice of Suspension letter (the ARC Letter , attached) from the Australian Research Council CEO in relation to Grant FT2200100427 (the Grant), a research project for which Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah (the Researcher) is the Sole/Chief Investigator.

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	<p>The ARC Letter outlines that the Grant was being suspended due to serious concerns relating to compliance with the Grant Agreement in respect of the Grant requiring one or more ‘investigations’ to be undertaken. Accordingly, the ARC noted that they have issued the suspension pursuant to clause 35.2.2 of the Grant Agreement.</p> <p>In the ARC Letter, concerns were raised which encompassed aspects of the management of the Grant as well as complaints about the alleged conduct of the Researcher, requiring Macquarie University to report back following ‘investigations’ and/or to supply to the ARC a list of requested information and associated materials. For example, the ARC required Macquarie University to engage an external independent auditor to evaluate financial management and expenditure associated with the Grant and ensure that funds are being applied in a manner consistent with the purposes for which funding was provided. This request was related to purported statements made by the Researcher about the use of funds and adherence to rules.</p> <p>Broadly, other aspects of the complaint outlined in the ARC Letter relate to whether research activities being undertaken for, or in association with the Grant, have been conducted in accordance with various requirements of the <i>Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research</i> (the Code) and the Grant Agreement, including whether conflicts of interest have been appropriately declared and managed.</p> <p>In addition to the complaint outlined in the ARC Letter, criticisms about the alleged conduct of the Researcher had been publicly expressed by other parties, including by members of parliament and/or journalists. [REDACTED]</p>
<p>Process followed</p>	<p>The ARC Letter [REDACTED] provided to Macquarie University’s Research Integrity Office (RIO) on <u>14 February 2025</u> for consideration following the <i>Macquarie University Research Code Complaints, Breaches and Investigation Procedure</i> (the “Macquarie Research Code Procedure”).</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>On 25 February 2025, via email to the ARC CEO, the RIO acknowledged receipt of the ARC’s complaint and advised that the University will be managing the ARC’s complaints in accordance with the <i>Macquarie Research Code Procedure</i> in association with the <i>Macquarie Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research</i>.</p>

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<p>Actions taken by MQ</p>	<p><u>Procedural steps</u></p> <p>The RIO has written [REDACTED] (as above) to confirm the process applying to the management of their complaints.</p> <p>An initial review of complaints was conducted by the DREI and RIO with regards to the ARC letter to determine whether any aspects fell outside of the <i>Macquarie Research Code Procedure</i>.</p> <p>The DREI considered the scope of the complaints and potential relationship to the <i>Macquarie Research Code</i> and, on 7 March 2025, determined that a Preliminary Assessment (PA) should be undertaken (per cl 2.3(b) <i>Macquarie Research Code Procedure</i>) which encompasses the complaints from [REDACTED] the ARC [REDACTED].</p> <p>A PA is currently being undertaken by Assessment Officers (AO) from the Macquarie University RIO according to the <i>Macquarie Research Code Procedure</i> (Clause 3.2).</p> <p>In association with the PA (clause 3.2.a.i.) the RIO and the AO have been identifying, collating and reviewing facts and evidence from a variety of sources and have identified information which needs to be sought or clarified with the Researcher, and from external and independent discipline-specific experts. These two aspects are also referred to below as they influence the projected timeframe for the completion of the PA.</p> <p><u>Precautionary actions (if any)</u></p> <p>Due to the suspension of the Grant, on 14 February 2025 the Researcher was directed not to undertake work of any kind related to or arising from the Grant.</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>
<p>Outcome</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Preliminary assessment likely to take longer than 12 weeks from date of receipt of complaint</p> <p>The projected prolonged preliminary assessment is due to the breadth and nature of the complaints as well as the need to obtain information from the Researcher and from independent discipline-specific experts (further described below).</p>

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	The involvement or interests of the complainants, in addition to media and parliamentary scrutiny, also add complexity and create additional administrative burden, which are anticipated to extend the timeframe of a PA .
Expected timeframe	<p>The nature of the research and methods being implemented adds complexity to the assessment of complaints.</p> <p>The complaints appear to relate to <u>specific</u> research activities, not all research activities, being completed in association with the Grant. In particular, the complaints appear to relate to research activities involving auto-ethnography/ethnography and other approaches being applied to solidarity politics research and social activism research in the Muslim/Arab community in Australia. Autoethnography appears to be a distinct and somewhat novel qualitative research method that combines autobiographical writing and ethnographic analysis to connect personal experiences with broader cultural, social, and political contexts (https://doi.org/10.1037/0000222-001 <i>Essentials of Autoethnography</i>, Poulos). Contemporary developments related to the research topic, media coverage and the influence of the methodological approaches on the perception of objectivity and management of interests in the research obfuscates the initial assessment of the complaints as part of the PA and warrants the incorporation of information from independent experts in the applicable field of research and methodological approaches. The RIO has identified the areas of knowledge and independence required of an expert and prepared appropriate Non-Disclosure Agreements for authorisation. An assessment of the suitability and availability of appropriate experts for this purpose is in progress.</p> <p>In addition to seeking information from discipline-specific experts, the AO deems it pertinent to clarify certain facts and/or information with the Researcher. This also extends the timeframe for the PA given that the AO needs to provide sufficient detail for the Researcher to understand the nature of the complaint while providing an appropriate opportunity for a response in writing (including an appropriate timeframe and mechanisms to ensure procedural fairness). Because of the Easter and Anzac Day holiday periods, an extended time period (beyond the default 10 working days) is being afforded to the Researcher to submit her response to the request for information from the AO.</p> <p>Considering the details outlined above, the Preliminary Assessment is anticipated to conclude in mid-to-late June.</p>