

Budget Estimates 2024-2025 Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education

Answers to questions taken on notice – Macquarie University

Hearing: Monday 10 March 2025.

Answers due by: 5pm Friday 4 April 2025

Submitted by email: BudgetEstimates@parliament.nsw.gov.au.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Do you have modules that students complete about a range of matters, including Indigenous heritage, sustainability and academic honesty, before students can access assignments and learning materials on myLearn?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: I thank you for that question. We do have those modules. They do not have to complete those modules before they can access learning materials. That again is a construct. I know not where it comes from. Students can access the learning materials before those modules are completed.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: When are students required to complete those modules?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: During the course of their studies.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And is every student required to complete a certain set of core modules?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: There are the four modules that you mentioned, at the moment: academic integrity, a safe campus for Macquarie University, sustainability, and the Indigenous heritage and culture module.

Those four modules are currently mandatory for students. In response to concerns that have been raised, as we do for all courses, we are regularly reviewing those courses' content and their nature.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So currently all four of those modules are compulsory for students during the course of their studies.

S. BRUCE DOWTON: They are now, yes.

QUESTION 1: The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And for how long have they been compulsory?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: I'd have to take that on notice. I don't have that.

ANSWER: The Safer Communities @MQ module has been mandatory for all commencing students since Session 2, 2024. The Manawari Student Training module was introduced for all students in Session 1, 2025. The Sustainability module was introduced in Session 1, 2025. The Academic Integrity module has been compulsory since 2018.

QUESTION 2: The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If you could, that would be great. The safer communities module, which students complete, does this deal with antisemitism?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: Again I'd have to look at that in detail to see if there is specific content about that. It certainly, I believe, deals with discrimination in general. I would have to take that

on notice. I would add that we have been in regular communication with both our staff and student bodies, where specifically antisemitism and Islamophobia have been raised, including by me personally, in written and oral communications with the university community.

ANSWER: No, this module does not deal specifically with antisemitism. The Safer Communities @ MQ module is aligned with TEQSA's Good Practice Note (2020) on preventing and responding to sexual misconduct. The module covers healthy relationships, affirmative consent, safer sex, respectful relationships, substance safety, reporting, support, and security services.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Thank you. And the Manawari module that's compulsory, does this include material that non-Indigenous students are taught that they are visitors and settlers in their own land?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: Those words were in the introduction to this module. When that was raised with me—as we do regularly for any course, it was raised with me—I asked that that be reviewed. Those words have now been removed.

QUESTION 3: The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And for how long were those words and that instruction present in that module before your review?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: I'd have to take that on notice and check when it went up.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If you could, that would be good. And what are the processes

ANSWER: Those words were present since the module was introduced on 31 January 2025. The language was reviewed and changed effective from 3 March 2025. The modules will be reviewed at the end of each academic year to ensure that they continue to be relevant.

QUESTION 4: The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Thank you. Have you been asked by the Australian Research Council to provide video or a transcript of Dr Abdel-Fattah's speech in which she, allegedly, has said that she refused an ARC requirement to stage a traditional academic conference and instead invited women to contribute revolutionary quotes and declared, "I refuse to cite anybody who has remained silent over Gaza. No matter how authoritative and big they are in their fields, they are deficient human beings"? Have you been asked to provide video or transcript?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: Macquarie University does not have a copy of that video or a transcript. That is the—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But you were asked by the ARC to provide that material?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: I would have to check with the deputy vice-chancellor. I'm not aware that we have been asked to provide that, but I have to take that on notice.

ANSWER: Macquarie University has not been requested by the ARC to provide a copy of the video or transcript of the event held at the Queensland University of Technology in December 2024. Macquarie University did, however, verbally inform the ARC in February 2025 that it did not possess a copy of the video or transcript of this event.

QUESTION 5: The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: How much of the \$870,000 research grant awarded to Dr Abdel-Fattah does the university currently retain?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: Again, I don't have that information here.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Can you provide it on notice, Professor?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: I can provide that, I believe, yes.

ANSWER: The ARC awarded grant funding of \$802,000 for the Future Fellowship project led by Dr Abdel-Fattah – to be paid across the course of the project. All of the funds allocated by the ARC are to be expended for the purposes of the research. Of the total allocated grant funding that have been dispersed to Macquarie from the ARC, \$413,478.52 has currently been expended on this research project.

QUESTION 6: The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Professor, if I could also draw your attention that this is a Macquarie University post on Instagram. This remained live as of last night. It's advice to new students "preparing for your studies at Macquarie". It says, "You'll need to complete four introductory modules to understand some of our policies, values and responsibilities." The four areas are listed, the fourth being student Manawari training. "You will find you have been automatically enrolled to the modules." The post goes on to say, "We encourage you to complete this as soon as possible to ensure you have full access to your unit content online." Access to study and content is not available, as represented by this post, until completion of these of these modules.

S. BRUCE DOWTON: I'm happy to take that on notice and look into that Instagram post.

ANSWER: The Faculty of Science and Engineering did have an Instagram post as described by the Hon. Rachel Merton which was removed shortly after it was drawn to the attention of the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic during the Budget Estimates hearing on 10 March. As of 12 March 2025, units in Aboriginal cultural awareness and sustainability were no longer compulsory.