



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2024-2025

Supplementary questions

Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education

Macquarie University

Hearing: Monday 10 March 2025

Answers due by: 5.00 pm Friday 4 April 2025

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BUDGET ESTIMATES 2024-2025

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

Questions from Ms Abigail Boyd MLC

- (1) How much debt does Macquarie University, and its associated entities, hold?
 - (a) For what purposes was this debt incurred?
 - (b) For debt incurred for capital expenditure, how is the return on investment calculated?
- (2) What is the calculated ROI for the establishment of Macquarie Hospital?
- (3) I am informed that, within the Executive, Macquarie University Buildings and Macquarie Hospital and any investment in them are viewed as marketing initiatives – primarily aimed at attracting both domestic and international students.
 - (a) Is this characterisation accurate?
 - (b) What is the estimated annual marketing value derived from these buildings and the hospital?
 - (c) How is this valuation arrived at?
- (4) If the \$850 million in debt that was incurred to fund capital expenditure and building works was instead invested in a diversified portfolio of ASX-listed shares:
 - (a) What would be the approximate annual income generated from such shares?
 - (b) How does that compare with the ROI from the University's decision to invest in buildings and the hospital?
- (5) What is the debt repayment schedule?
- (6) How much debt is due for renewal in the next:
 - (a) 12 months
 - (b) 24 months
 - (c) 36 months
- (7) What are the current interest rates paid on existing debt?
- (8) What interest rate do you anticipate for debt that requires renewal in the next 12 months?
- (9) What is the approximate annual value of repayments, including both interest and principal?

- (10) Is it accurate to say that approximately \$100 million per year is being transferred from teaching revenues to service the debt associated with buildings and the hospital? If not, why not?
- (11) Does the need to repay or refinance this debt influence Executive decisions regarding reductions in courses, unit offerings, and staffing?
- (12) I am informed that teaching at Macquarie University is cash-flow positive, with teaching costs amounting to only about one third of teaching generated revenue.
 - (a) What is the revenue and expenses associated with teaching in each Faculty?
- (13) I am informed that, despite teaching generating significant income, there have been sharp curriculum cuts and rumours of further major reductions and job losses. What is the justification for the decision to reduce student choices and push staff into unemployment when their work generates considerable income?
- (14) Does the financial burden from the debt influence decision-making related to teaching and staffing?
- (15) The university has indicated in the media that it is planning to spend up to \$700 million over the next 10 years in a digital transformation and IT infrastructure. (<https://www.itnews.com.au/news/macquarie-uni-to-spend-up-to-700m-on-10-year-digital-transformation-607861>)
 - (a) In the context of cuts to courses, units and staff, what is the justification for such a large expenditure?
 - (b) Please explain how this is a good investment, both in terms of ROI, and also in terms of delivering a better education for students, a better workplace for staff, and value for money for the Australian taxpayer?
- (16) An academic staff member at Macquarie University has recently experienced significant media and political attacks. Can you outline how the University is upholding these four critical values in this situation:
 - (a) Academic freedom
 - (b) Due process
 - (c) Duty of care to staff, and
 - (d) Australian Research Council independence from political interference

- (17) A recent internal document, the "Blueprint for Academic Workforce," proposes a new annual process in which each Executive Dean selects the courses and units to offer, followed by a bidding (expression-of-interest) process where staff nominate their preferred teaching. The Executive Dean would then make centralised decisions about teaching allocation.
- (a) Is this plan intended to be implemented this year for teaching in 2026?
 - (b) Do you foresee significant cuts to units and courses as a result?
 - (c) Do you anticipate staff redundancies stemming from this process?
- (18) This policy would significantly centralise decision-making power in the hands of Executive Deans, reducing the influence schools, departments, and disciplines currently have over teaching and workload allocation.
- (a) Does this shift indicate that you have abandoned a commitment to collegial decision making?
 - (b) Do you have concerns about the potential for poor decision-making or abuse of power resulting from this centralisation?
- (19) Over the past six years, Macquarie University has experienced multiple cuts to curriculum and staffing, alongside major restructuring initiatives. I've been informed that these changes have significantly harmed staff morale and mental health.
- (a) How do you respond to the fact that low morale and poor mental health have occurred under your leadership?
 - (b) How is morale and mental health monitored?
 - (c) Are surveys, internal management reviews and staff forums adequate means of addressing issues regarding staff ownership and engagement?
 - (d) Is the University Council aware of this crisis of morale and mental health?
 - (e) Moving forward, how will you adjust your governance approach to address these concerns?
- (20) The Vice-Chancellor's salary is over \$1 million dollars per year, nearly twice that of the Prime Minister. And there are another roughly ten executives on salaries that are similar to the Prime Minister's.
- (a) How do you respond to people who say that these salaries are likely perceived by Australian citizens as a breach of trust?

- (b) How do you respond to people who say that these salaries undermine the social licence and legitimacy of Universities?
 - (c) Can you make a commitment to reducing these salaries to at least the level of the Federal Cabinet?
- (21) Recently Macquarie University joined the Business Council of Australia. The Business Council of Australia often finds itself lobbying on behalf of the richest Australians and the largest Australian corporations, with a very particular political orientation towards serving the needs of the most privileged and affluent members of Australian society. For example, the BCA is often promoting deregulated labour markets and tax breaks for the wealthiest Australians.
- (a) Can you explain the rationale for this decision?
 - (b) How can a public institution like Macquarie University justify joining an institution that serves a very narrow and privileged section of Australian society?
 - (c) How do you believe staff, students, and the general public will perceive Macquarie University siding with the top end of town?
- (22) According to Times Higher Education (THE), Macquarie University has the worst student to staff ratio in Australia and one of the worst in the world. How do you explain these figures, which have consistently reported Macquarie University as having the worst ratios year after year?
- (a) If you dispute this claim, have you taken any steps to correct this journalistic record?
 - (b) Given these figures, why is Macquarie University management signalling intentions for even more course and unit rationalisation and staff cuts?
- (23) It has been proposed by the Executive that between 50% and 100% of the first year classes of each degree will be compulsory generic courses in 2026. This would mean that 2000-3000 arts students, for example, would do between four and eight generic first year classes with presumably 2000-3000 students in each course.
- (a) Can you confirm this is true and that you agree with this plan?
 - (b) How can there be a common curriculum across such diversity of majors - from archaeology, to philosophy, to English literature, to Spanish, and Media?

- (c) Is there not a risk that these will all become essay writing, CV writing, and learning how to reference classes? And how will student experience not be compromised by such massive and so generic classes?
- (24) How many reasonable adjustments, accommodations and/or special considerations were applied for, in each calendar year from 2018?
 - (a) Of these, how many were granted?