

# THE CONVERSATION

2016 Stakeholder Report



# FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Perhaps the most striking development of 2016 was the emergence of a political discourse so divorced from facts and rationality that Oxford Dictionaries declared “post-truth” the international word of the year. It was very much in the air with Donald Trump – who has claimed climate change is a hoax and vaccines cause autism – but Australia copped a fair dose too. Pauline Hanson said we were in danger of being swamped by Muslims, just 2.2 per cent of the population. Her One Nation colleague, Malcolm Roberts, alleged a tight-knit cabal of “major banking families in the world” is advancing corrupted climate science. The disconcerting global progress of this new unreality was summed up before the Brexit vote when Michael Gove said that “people in this country have had enough of experts”.

At The Conversation we beg to differ. We exist to provide the public with credible information direct from academic experts. Ultimately we hope that this information will improve the quality of public discourse and rebuild the trust and respect that rightly should be afforded our leading academics and thinkers.

It's more than five years since we launched this project, and despite the discouraging global climate, our influence is growing and our work is now more vital than ever. As we redouble our efforts for 2017, I hope you'll enjoy reflecting on the milestones of the

year in this report. We are as proud of our impact in the Australian media as we are of our growing international network, with editions in UK, US, Africa, France, Australia and a TC-Global team. We are also now working more closely with reputable partner organisations such as the ABC to more widely share new research and academic insights.

My thanks to the many academics who generously make time to contribute their ideas; it's a privilege to work with you. Thanks also to the editors and staff in Australia who roll up their sleeves to make it all happen. And thanks to our university partners, funders, supporters, Friends of TC who donated, and of course to our army of loyal readers. Your support brings this project to life and helps us provide a daily demonstration of the true value and relevance of academic expertise.



**Misha Ketchell**  
Managing Editor

## Our Charter

- Inform public debate with knowledge-based journalism that is responsible, ethical and supported by evidence.
- Unlock the knowledge of researchers and academics to provide the public with clarity and insight into society's biggest problems.
- Create an open site for people around the world to share best practices and collaborate on developing smart, sustainable solutions.
- Provide a fact-based and editorially independent forum, free of commercial or political bias.
- Support and foster academic freedom to conduct research, teach, write and publish.
- Ensure the site's integrity by only obtaining non-partisan sponsorship from education, government and private partners. Any advertising will be relevant and non-obtrusive.
- Protect editorial freedom in all commercial agreements.
- Ensure quality, diverse and intelligible content reaches the widest possible audience by employing experienced editors to curate the site.
- Set the standard in journalism best practice. Be open, transparent and accountable. Where errors occur correct them expeditiously.
- Work with our academic, business and government partners and our advisory board to ensure we are operating for the public good.

# FROM THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

The Conversation has come a long way in the last five years.

When co-founders Andrew Jaspan and Jack Rejtman were meeting in cafes across Melbourne to advance the big idea of turning academics into journalists, who would have predicted we'd now have an audience of 3.8 million a month – with a reach of 35 million through republication, editorial teams in five countries and over 43,000 registered researchers and academics?

We are said to live in a post-truth time where a viable business model for quality news looks lost forever, social media dominates how people get information and misinformation and spin is getting hard to identify.

Access to trusted, evidence-based analysis and news has never been harder to get and never been more crucial to inform a functioning democracy.

The Conversation has worked because people want it to. In Australia we have 38 out of 39 universities that play an active part in the project as funding members.

We have two more years of support from the Victorian government and are working with them to map Conversation topics to the Australian Curriculum and make it easier for teachers and students to connect with our universities.

Grants from The Australian Cancer Research Foundation, The Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation and the City of Melbourne go directly to pay for our editors to work with researchers on articles.

The Myer Foundation's grant for our Indonesia-based editor draws to a close – but they helped us find wider support for a new pilot team in Jakarta from the The Open Society Foundations.

The Commonwealth Bank has been the major supporter of The Conversation and this year the bank has enabled us to make significant improvements in the performance of our Data Warehouse. We're collecting over 30,000,000 new reads every month – and this is growing fast.

Cors Chambers Westgarth has provided pro-bono legal service, both on media law and also advice on our expanding global network.

Generous donations from readers and friends have helped us on our mission – we make every dollar count. To all those Friends who have given this year – we thank you. We've been able to do more vital fact checking as a direct result of a crowd funded campaign.

In 2017 we'll be looking for more support from our intern program, and to do more on indigenous and mental health research.

A new grant in 2017 from the AMP Foundation will allow us to do more on the changing nature of work; ageing workforce, skills for future industries, automation and technology and working in today's society.

We're right in the middle of an important process to set up The Conversation for the future.

We welcomed a number of new and very talented people to the TC family this year, who have already helped us enormously.

I would like to extend my thanks to Chair of the Board Robert Johanson, the Board of Directors, the Editorial Board, the management team, and the editors and staff at The Conversation whose professionalism and commitment to the project has helped make it thrive.

We are full of optimism about the development of The Conversation in Australia and the impact of our growing global network.

And we're more determined than ever before to inject facts and evidence – and journalistic flair – into public discourse.



**Lisa Watts**  
Chief Operating Officer

# 2016 IN REVIEW

TC editions in AU, UK, US, Africa, France.

Monthly audience of 2.7m users onsite and reach of 23m through republication.

30,000 authors.

94,000 newsletter, 125,000 Facebook, and 90,000 Twitter followers.



Celebrate our 5th anniversary.



Federal budget coverage.



January

February

March

April

May

June



Cities + Policy editor commences, funded by Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation and the City of Melbourne.



Readership hits 3m on-site for the first time.



Public event: An Evening in conversation with Michelle Grattan at Federation Square's Deakin Edge. Also included launch of book 10 ideas for Australia.

Annual Friends of The Conversation campaign results in 3,500+ individual supporters.

University of Adelaide joins as a member.

Federal election coverage.



Launch of TC Global.

Charles Sturt University joins as a member.



Launch of Yearbook 2016: 50 standout articles from Australia's top thinkers.

Received The Australian Council for Educational Leaders media award for outstanding education coverage.



July

August

September

October

November

December



ABC journalist is embedded in TC newsroom to feed TC ideas and authors into ABC online, broadcast and radio.



Macquarie University joins as a member.



Southern Cross University and Federation University join as members.

Monthly audience of 3.8m users onsite and reach of 35m through republication.

43,000 authors.

113,000 newsletter, 166,000 Facebook, 112,000 Twitter followers.

## A GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

The Conversation now operates 6 editions: Australia, UK, US, Africa, France and Global.

These editions serve local universities and readership and, through our content sharing and global commissioning, also serve a global audience and perspective.

We now have around 90 editors working with 43,000 authors globally, making us one of the world's largest virtual newsrooms, and positioning us to provide a unique approach to borderless sharing of knowledge.

Each local edition is funded by universities and foundations in those countries. Content can be shared across editions, giving local academics the potential for increased global exposure to their work.

All TC editions operate under a licence that ensures compliance with our editorial charter and codes of conduct. That way all TC content, wherever it originates, is evidence-based, independent and for public good.

We hope to soon announce new launches for 2017.



# MEMBERSHIP

We are a non-profit and rely on the support of university and research institutes, who pay an annual membership fee.

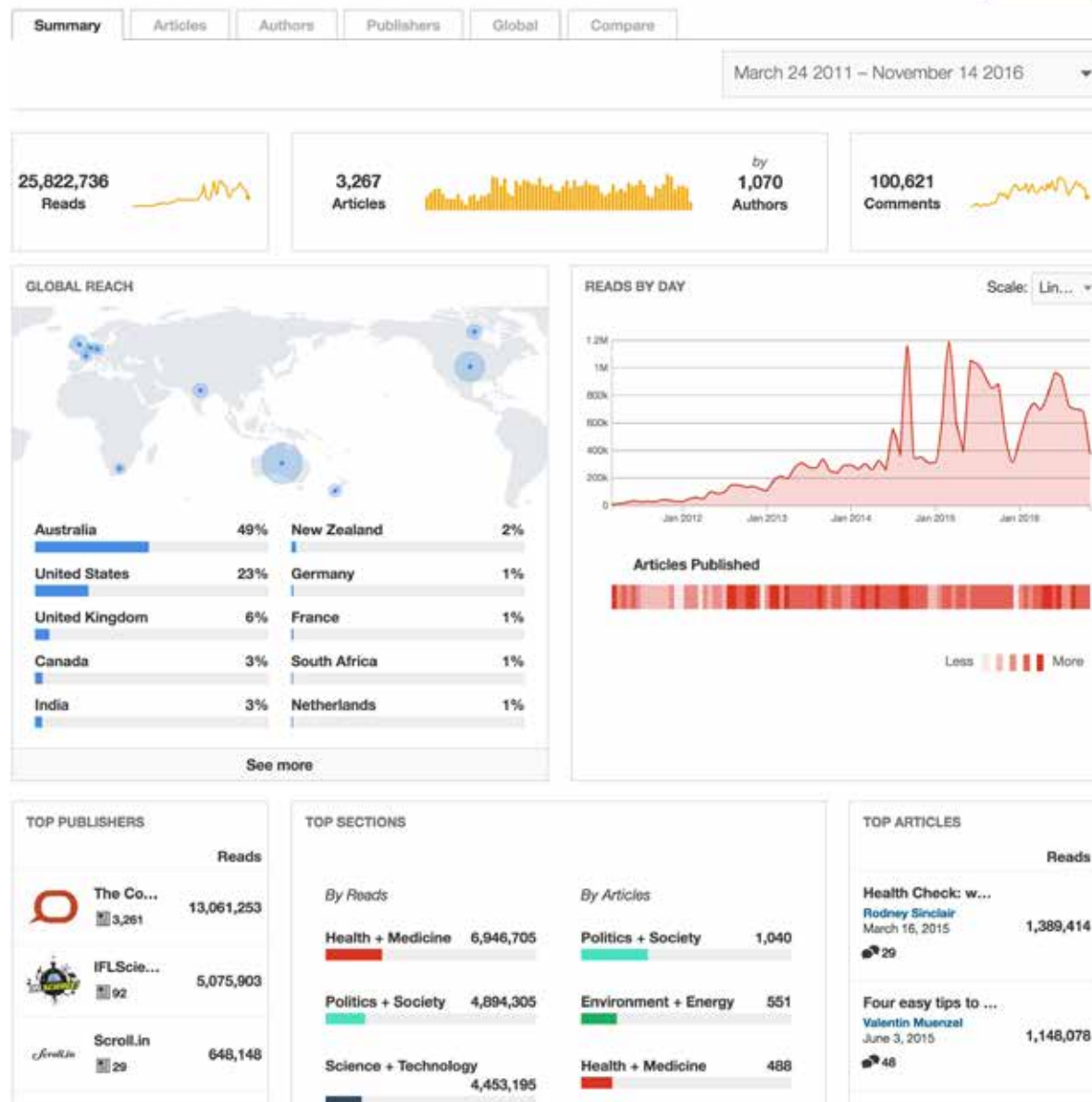
Member benefits include: metrics that track social impact and engagement; on-site member designation; free events listings; on-campus training seminars; access to student internship programs; and advance notice on editorial planning through daily expert requests that invite members to pitch their academics on items we're chasing.

We're delighted to announce we've secured membership of the vast majority of the sector, with 38 of the 39 universities members of The Conversation in Australia.

## MEMBER BENEFITS

- Metrics + dashboard access ✓
- Daily expert request callout ✓
- Onsite article designation ✓
- Intern program ✓
- Media training and seminars ✓

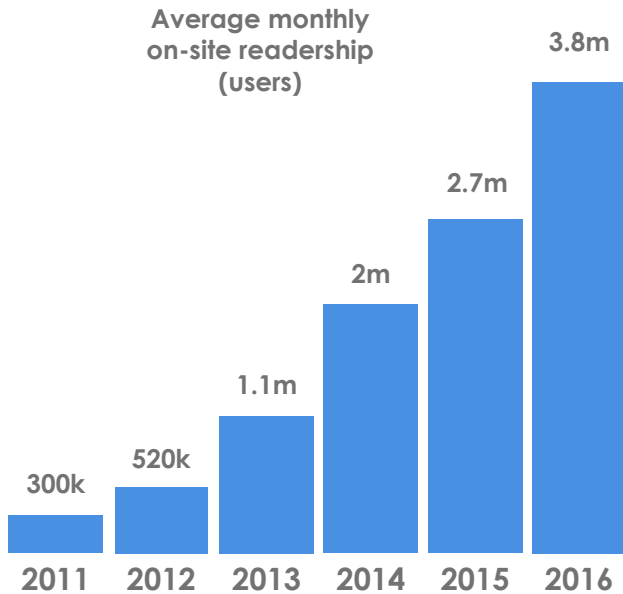
## INSTITUTION DASHBOARD













# AUDIENCE

Our monthly audience has grown to 3.8m users onsite, with a reach of 35m through republication.

We continue to reach a general-public audience, with a readership that is over 82% non-academic. Around 50% of readers are from outside Australia. The breakdown is:



## TOP 10 COUNTRIES BY READERSHIP

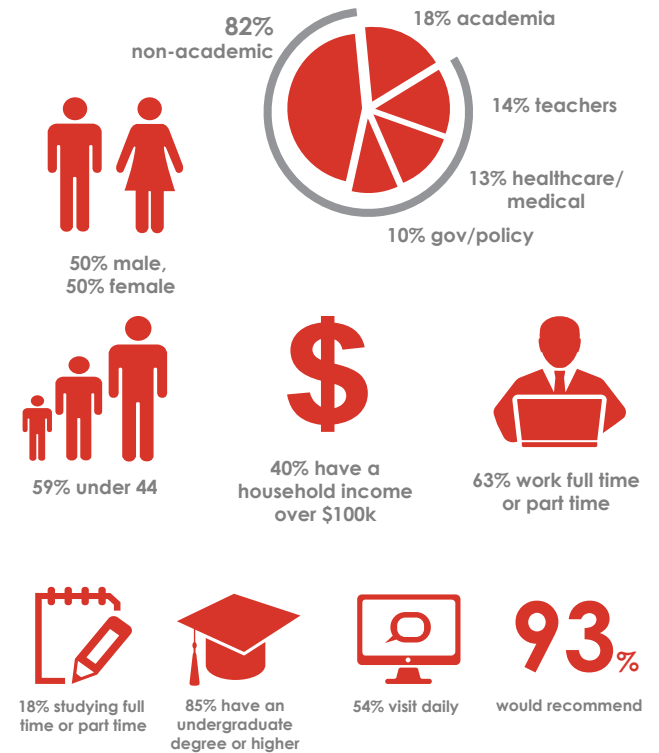
1. Australia 
2. United States 
3. United Kingdom 
4. France 
5. Canada 
6. South Africa 
7. India 
8. New Zealand 
9. Germany 
10. Philippines 

## Monthly audience

**3.8**  
million  
users  
on site

**35**  
million  
reach  
through  
republication




## Our readers





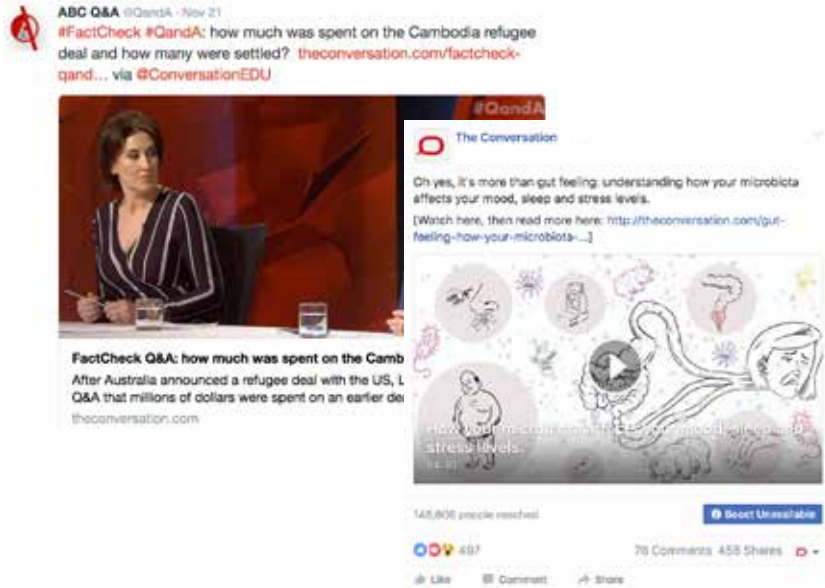
# SOCIAL

Our daily newsletter, Facebook and Twitter channels are our main traffic sources and have all grown well above 100K followers this year.

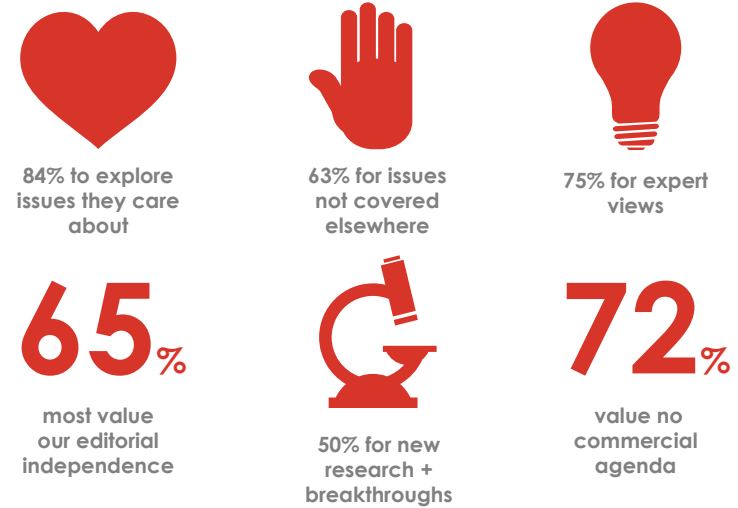
 **166k**  
 **113k**  
 **112k**

## Engaged audience

After reading an article:



### Why they read:



## MEDIA + REPLICATION

**35<sub>m</sub>**  
reads / month

**22<sub>k</sub>**  
republishers

We believe in the free flow of information and proudly publish under creative commons. That means that anyone, anywhere in the world, can republish our articles and infographics either online, or in print. And it's free.

We want our authors to have the largest possible audience to disseminate their knowledge. And we want media to publish content that's trusted and of the highest ethical standards. By allowing open source republication of our content, we speak to the heart of our mission to improve the access to quality information in the public domain.

To date, some 22,000 sites have republished our articles. This republication network delivers us a massive readership of 35 million each and every month, on top of the 3.8 million readers directly to our site.

This year, we deepened our relationship with the ABC, who embedded one of their senior journalists in our newsroom to pick up ideas and feed them through the ABC, as republication opportunities or as experts for broadcast and radio interview. The relationship has proved extremely valuable for all involved: the authors, The Conversation, the ABC and most importantly everyone who wants to better understand what's going on in an increasingly specialised and complex world.



## MEDIA + REPUBLICATION

“ I was interviewed by Kia Handley of ABC Regional Drive, and invited to speak on a conference panel in Melbourne, as well as deliver a public lecture later this year. My article was also republished by the ABC, The Guardian, SBS and ArchitectureAU.

– Sam Bowker, CSU

“ I did radio interviews with 2SER Sydney and ABC 612 Brisbane, was interviewed for a story on the 730 Report, and was interviewed for the Australian Women’s Weekly.

– Cassandra Cross, QUT

“ I was interviewed for ABC News 24 TV, 702 Drive Radio, News Radio, Far North Radio, and for a story on Xinhua News Agency.

– Mark Humphery-Jenner, UNSW Australia

“ I did multiple radio interviews and appeared on Channel 9’s Weekend Today show.

– Rachel Wilson, USyd

## Author impact + engagement

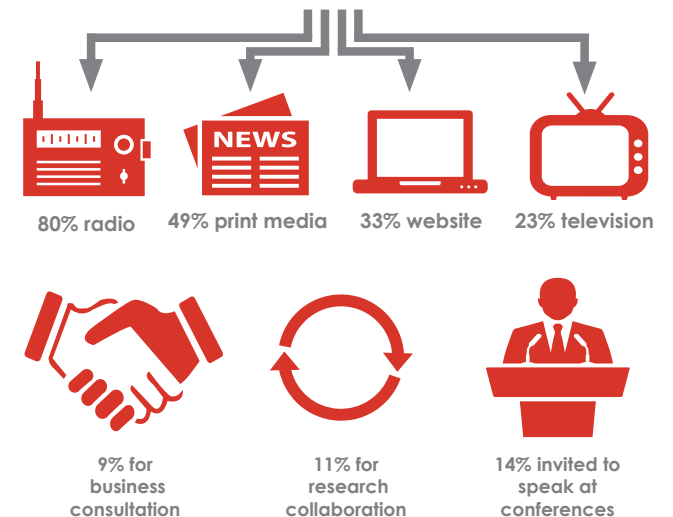
# 43,000

registered authors

After writing an article:

# 55%

of authors contacted by media



# RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT METRICS

We provide all authors and member institutions a dashboard and metrics to track their post-article engagement and impact. To date, these metrics have focused primarily on reach and readership data, including number of reads, location of readers, sites republishing, social media reach, and more.

This year, we undertook a project to enhance the post-publication Research Engagement Metrics we provide to authors and institutions.

Our ambition is for The Conversation's Research Engagement Metrics to measure research engagement and knowledge transfer across the global higher education sector. Used across our network of more than 1,500 research organisations, they will establish international standardised research engagement indicators. We hope our Research Engagement Metrics will allow for national and international benchmarking of engagement activities between universities and research-users, and the adoption of new and emerging modes of scholarly communication beyond traditional journal publications.

## AUTHOR DASHBOARD



## RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT METRICS

We are piloting three new Research Engagement Metrics.

1. The **Knowledge Transfer Activity (KTA)** metric indicates the extent of knowledge transfer activities taking place as measured by the normalised number of articles and readers of those articles. This directly measures where there is more or less knowledge transfer occurring across different organisations. This allows organisational performance to be benchmarked and compared within a given reference period.
2. The **Media Engagement Intensiveness (MEI)** metric measures the extent to which readers are engaging with articles published on The Conversation via discussions, comments and social media. This is measured along an engagement continuum, where there are more and less intensive forms of engagement. This directly measures where there is more or less media engagement occurring across different organisations. This allows for organisations to be benchmarked and compared within a given reference period.
3. The **Media Influence (MI)** metric measures the extent to which authors and institutions are influencing public discussions around issues and research topics. This is measured by where articles are republished across traditional media outlets and new media platforms. Outlets where articles are republished are ranked in terms of their own media influence in order to derive this metric.

We hope to have further news on the trial of these metrics in early 2017. Our thanks to the Steering Committee, made up of international experts in research evaluation, for their support and advice.



## ENGAGEMENT + IMPACT



“ One of the best things about writing for The Conversation is that it helps me reach the rest of the world from here in Toowoomba. My first two articles have been republished and read in more than 10 countries, including Japan, Germany and India. That international exposure is fuelling a whirlwind of new opportunities: I’ve been approached by industry leaders such as Microsoft, and given in-kind funding from Amazon to further my work. I’ve also received invaluable invitations to industry events, such as the recent chance to meet Dr. Werner Vogels, Chief Technology Officer and Vice President of Amazon.com.

Timothy McCallum, Senior Analyst,  
University of Southern Queensland



“ After writing my first two articles for The Conversation this year, I was approached to join the Board of Directors of the Australian Privacy Foundation, have been invited to give talks for civil society organisations such as Amnesty International, consulted directly with the Commonwealth Government on privacy issues, and have appeared on ABC and other news media. As an early career researcher, this public exposure has been invaluable in getting my name and research out nationally and internationally.

Monique Mann, Lecturer, School of Justice, Faculty of Law, Crime and Justice Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology



“ My Conversation article was quoted in detail by a Labor Senator while he was questioning the chief executive of the ANZ Bank at Parliament House in October. That happened only a few hours after the article – about banks making millions from delaying interest rate cuts – was published. The leader of Katter’s Australian Party, Bob Katter, also shared it with his party’s Facebook followers. It was very pleasing to see my analysis being immediately read and shared by federal politicians across the political spectrum.

Abbas Valadkhani, Professor of Economics,  
Swinburne University of Technology

## ENGAGEMENT + IMPACT



““ The Conversation articles I’ve published have led to connections and opportunities that almost certainly would not have come about through other means. Following a recent article I wrote on blood donation I received an email from the Red Cross, inviting me to speak directly to them. The article was also republished in Australian Doctor magazine, after which I was contacted by GPs. Another article led directly to an invitation to speak at a medical conference. My articles have been picked up by a wide range of international media outlets, as well as health and industry websites – none of which would be attuned to traditional academic outputs.

Jennifer Power, Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University Australia



““ After my article on name-blind resumes was published, I was brought on to Channel 10’s The Project with Waleed Aly (which reached over 700,000 primetime viewers) and interviewed on eight radio stations. More importantly, it sparked a national debate on the issue of name-blind resumes. Today, the governments of Victoria, Western Australia, and ACT are all drawing on that impetus to trial name-blind recruitment in the public service. For me, The Conversation has been an indispensable instrument: it’s helped me achieve not only public audience outreach but real policy impacts.

Usman W. Chohan, Doctoral Candidate, Policy Reform and Economics, UNSW Australia



““ Writing for The Conversation has helped my work attract local, national and international attention, including a TV interview for Channel NewsAsia in Singapore and a feature article in The Atlantic in the US. Some articles have an impact even years after publication, particularly an article I wrote back in 2013 on Aboriginal music sent into space on the Voyager spacecraft. That story continues to resonate hugely, here and overseas; among other things, it’s been included in an anthology of the Best Australian Science Writing and cited in a published paper.

Alice Gorman, Senior Lecturer in archaeology and space studies, Flinders University

# THE CONVERSATION CMS PLATFORM

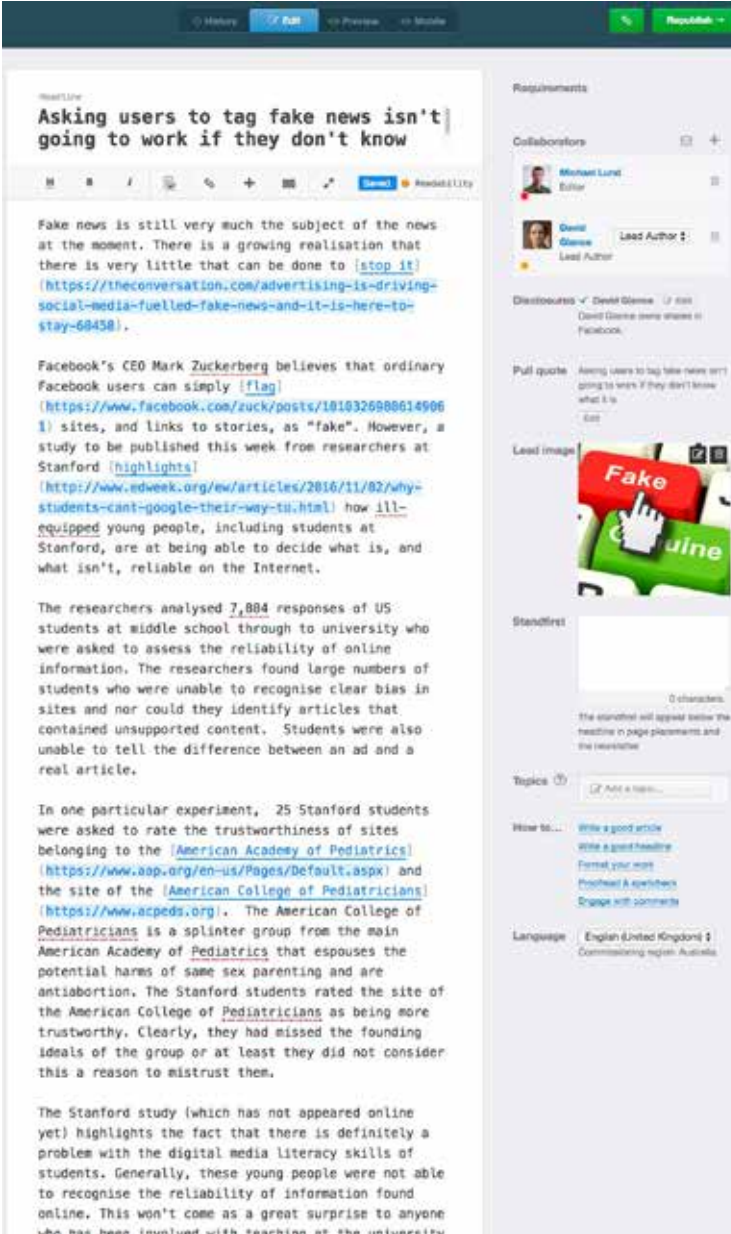
Our CMS platform - The ConversationCMS - was developed in Melbourne by The Conversation team to support our collaborative approach to journalism. The platform is maintained in Melbourne and used across our global network.

Most authors and editors say The ConversationCMS is the best publishing tool they've used.

The Commonwealth Bank are our technology partner and provide services and funding to enable our technology platform. We are grateful for their partnership and as Australia's largest bank applaud their vision and commitment to innovation. CBA's world-class IT support has helped make The Conversation a reality.

We have embedded codes of conduct into our CMS that are designed to support our charter and rebuild trust in journalism. For example, the innovative CMS platform:

- Allows for collaborative writing between editors and authors
- Contains an inbuilt readability index, set to the level of an educated 16 year old. This ensures all articles can be read by later high-school students. The traffic-light system associated with the readability index also provides authors with guidance about how to write in plain language and make their writing more accessible
- Requires author approval and sign off before publication. This safeguards against any potential errors introduced through editing, and provides a safe publishing environment for all authors
- Requires disclosure statements that authors complete prior to publication, so the reader knows any potential conflict around funding, financial gain, political party membership and others
- Contains a history bar that tracks every change to the article and allows easy reversion to earlier drafts
- Enables rich engagement analytics, and allows authors to track post-article impact and engagement.



The screenshot displays the The Conversation CMS interface. The main content area shows a draft article with the title "Asking users to tag fake news isn't going to work if they don't know". The article text discusses the challenges of fake news and the need for better digital media literacy skills. The interface includes a top navigation bar with "History", "Edit", "Preview", and "Mobile" options. A right-hand sidebar contains several sections: "Requirements", "Collaborators" (listing Michael Lund and David Glavin), "Disclosures" (for David Glavin), "Pull quote", "Lead image" (featuring a "Fake" vs "Genuine" sign), "Standfirst", "Topics" (with a search field), "How to..." (with links for writing, formatting, proofreading, and engagement), and "Language" (set to English (United Kingdom)).



# THE CONVERSATION CMS PLATFORM

## In-built readability index

### Readability

You are currently writing for high school students. This allows you to reach a wider audience.

Word count:	1,862
Average words per sentence:	17.73
Syllables per word:	1.6
Character count:	11,365



#### How can I improve the readability of my article?

- Sentences with 17 words or less are easier to understand.
- Keep paragraphs to a maximum of three sentences.
- Eliminate acronyms.
- Avoid jargon.
- Avoid stringing together multiple prepositions.
- Don't verb nouns.

[Close](#)

## Mandatory author disclosure statements

### Disclosure

This will appear alongside your article.

**ⓘ** We ask authors to disclose any funding or affiliation that is relevant, or could be perceived to be relevant, to the subject about which they are writing. This transparency is designed to protect the author's reputation and that of The Conversation. Authors who fail to disclose relevant information may be banned from contributing in future.

Do you work for, consult with or own shares in any company or organisation that would benefit from this article?

Yes  No

Do you receive, or have you previously received, any relevant external funding, including government-funded, foundation or research council grants?

Yes  No

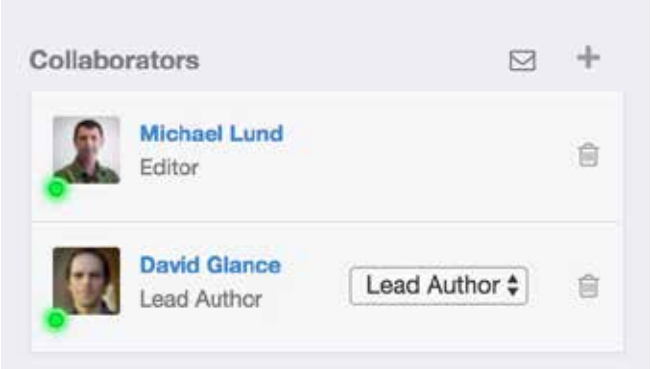
Do you have any other relevant affiliations that should be disclosed? This includes currently being a member of or volunteer for a political party, industry association, not-for-profit group, think tank or other politically active bodies.

Yes  No





If you have any questions about what you should disclose, please contact your editor.

## Collaborative editing interface

### Collaborators



[✉](#) [+](#)

-  **Michael Lund**  
Editor 
-  **David Glance**  
Lead Author Lead Author ▾ 

Supported by



## INTERN PROGRAM

Twenty-six interns from 15 universities went through The Copyright Agency program this year.

We placed interns across each editorial section, as well as multimedia, the election team, and with Michelle Grattan in the Press Gallery at Parliament House.

Interns join us part-time for 12 weeks and complete a structured program of recruitment, induction, and mentoring. Interns are exposed to the full range of editorial activities, including: pitching ideas, research, commissioning, fact checking, editing, publication, and social media.

The internship program is open to applicants from our member universities. There are 4 intakes a year.

“The articles were a joy to develop; including the process of visiting the collections at the Australian Museum, interviewing Tim Flannery and writing.


“The internship was a major factor in getting me a job, thanks to the responsibility I was given and social media skills I learned.

“It really helped me focus on what kind of journalist I'd like to be as well as what kind of organisation I should aim for.

“Throughout my internship I gained confidence and learnt a lot about editing, writing, the media, politics and the research community.

Supported by

COPYRIGHT AGENCY  
**CULTURAL  
FUND**



“I would recommend this internship to any student looking to gain experience in a media newsroom - anyone should jump at the opportunity to learn from a team as accommodating and experienced as the one at The Conversation.

- Marta Skrabacz, P+S intern, 2016

# JOBS, EVENT LISTINGS + NEWSLETTER SPONSORSHIP

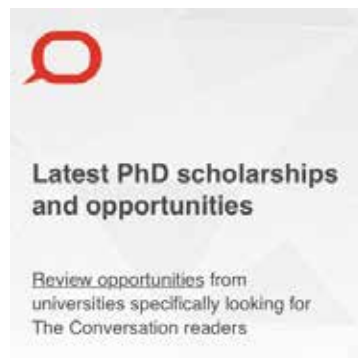
Advertisers can reach our large, educated audience through the job board, event listing, and newsletter sponsorship. In line with our charter, all advertising is relevant and non-obtrusive.


## Jobs Board

Our job board is where experts find jobs, particularly in teaching, higher education, health, research, media, policy and government sectors. This year we created a new section on the jobs board to profile PhD scholarships and HRD opportunities. Universities that use the service have scholarship opportunities displayed throughout the home and section pages and at the bottom of any articles from their university.

2,780 jobs have been posted from over 100 organisations this year, and since its launch, 15,000 jobs have been advertised on The Conversation's job board.

For more information about working with The Conversation to advertise your vacancies, contact [jobboard@theconversation.edu.au](mailto:jobboard@theconversation.edu.au).

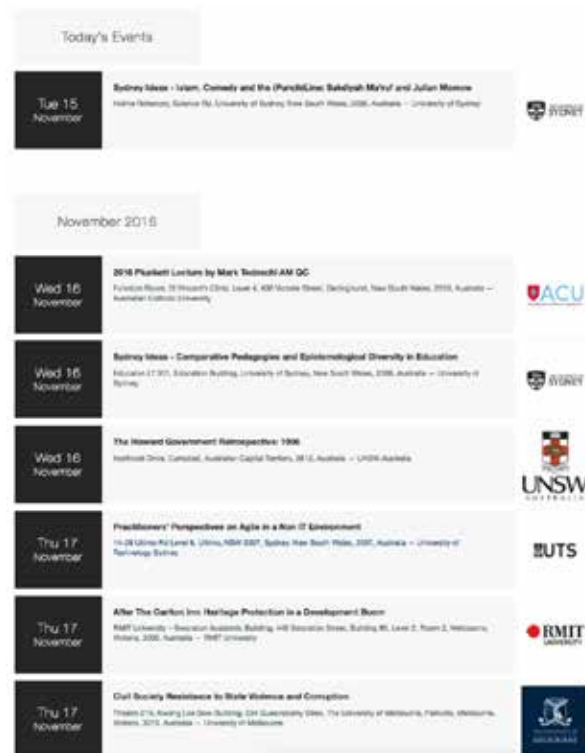


  
**Latest PhD scholarships and opportunities**  
  
Review opportunities from universities specifically looking for The Conversation readers

## Events

Events are listed on our Events page, and also alongside articles written by the institution hosting the event if posted by a member institution.

Contact: [eventlistings@theconversation.edu.au](mailto:eventlistings@theconversation.edu.au).



Today's Events

- Tue 15 November**  
Betsey Nixon - Islam, Comedy and the (Pseudo)Line: Sakiyah M'Yusuf and Julian Marrow  
Hanna Newman, Science 10, University of Sydney, New South Wales, 2006, Australia - University of Sydney

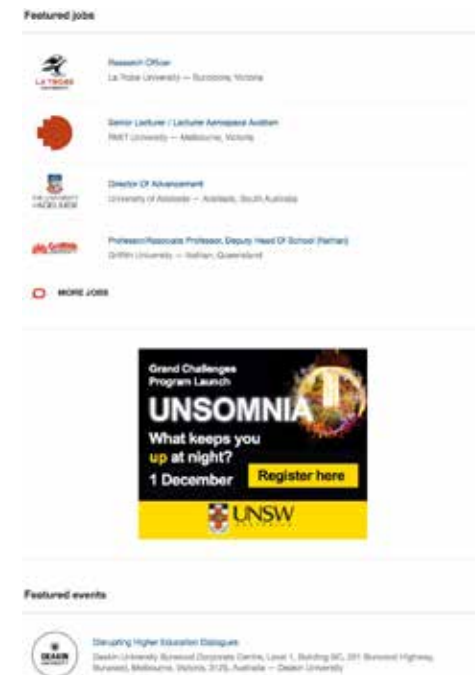
November 2018

- Wed 16 November**  
2018 Plunkett Lectures by Mark Twiss  
Function Room, 12 Research Drive, Level 4, RSP Science Tower, Kensington, New South Wales, 2015, Australia - Australian Catholic University
- Wed 16 November**  
Betsey Nixon - Comparative Pedagogies and Epistemological Diversity in Education  
Education 17.305, Education Building, University of Sydney, New South Wales, 2006, Australia - University of Sydney
- Wed 16 November**  
The Howard Government Retrospective 1996  
Institute Drive, Cammeraj, Australia Capital Territory, 2616, Australia - UNSW Australia
- Thu 17 November**  
Precisionist Perspectives on Agile in a Non IT Environment  
14-28 Ulterior Rd Level 4, Ullaroo, NSW 2207, Sydney New South Wales, 2007, Australia - University of Technology Sydney
- Thu 17 November**  
After The Carlton Inn: Heritage Protection in a Development Boom  
RMIT University - Selection Academic Building, 480 Bourke Street, Building 9L, Level 2, Point 2, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000, Australia - RMIT University
- Thu 17 November**  
Civil Society Resistance to State Violence and Corruption  
Theatre 010, Keating Law Centre Building, 224 Queensland Street, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Melbourne, Victoria, 3010, Australia - University of Melbourne





## Newsletter sponsorship

Universities, research institutes, libraries, museums and partners have all taken advantage of sponsorship of our daily newsletter this year. We now have over 113,000 subscribers to our daily newsletter.

To check availability, contact: [sponsor@theconversation.edu.au](mailto:sponsor@theconversation.edu.au).





Featured jobs

-  **Research Officer**  
La Trobe University - Bundoora, Victoria
-  **Senior Lecturer / Lecturer Advanced Aviation**  
RMIT University - Melbourne, Victoria
-  **Director Of Advancement**  
University of Adelaide - Adelaide, South Australia
-  **Professor/Associate Professor, Deputy Head Of School (Research)**  
QUT University - Nathan, Queensland

[MORE JOBS](#)

Featured events

-  **Grand Challenges Program Launch**  
**UNSOMNIA**  
What keeps you up at night?  
1 December  
[Register here](#)
-  **Deakin Higher Education Dialogue**  
Deakin University - Burnwood Corporate Centre, Level 1, Building 9C, 201 Burnwood Highway, Burnwood, Melbourne, Victoria, 3125, Australia - Deakin University



## FRIENDS OF THE CONVERSATION

We invite readers who value our service to donate and become a Friend of The Conversation. Donations are tax deductible and make a big difference.

This year, 3,500+ people donated and became a Friend. Thanks to their support, we crowd-sourced a second FactCheck editor, adding to our vital watchdog journalism work that sorts fact from spin in public debate.

Friends are listed on site on a dedicated supporter page, and their profiles are designated with a "Friends" logo.

Independent information is vital in a functioning democracy, and trust is an ever-dwindling asset in the media landscape. We are deeply humbled by the support of our Friends who back our ambition to increase the quality of information in public debate. To all of you who donated \$10 and to those who provided more, thank you.



**Become a friend of The Conversation**  
...and be a part of a better conversation

## HIGHLIGHTS: ARTS + CULTURE

This year we introduced a number of new columns – covering architecture, the craft of writing, and the value of culture. Film scholar Bruce Isaacs also began a video column, *Close Up*, in which he analysed a single scene from a classic film.

Our new Friday essays proved to be extremely popular. These in-depth essays explored topics such as Islam and homosexuality, threats to cultural heritage and how Shakespeare influenced the work of Germaine Greer.

Our ongoing series, *Taste of a Nation*, looked at our food-crazy culture while *Making Art Pay* considered policy solutions to the pressing question of how artists could make a living wage. These were complemented by our regular *Guides to the Classics*, in which literary scholars looked at great works of literature.

Major events reviewed included the Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne festivals, Adelaide's OzAsia festival, major exhibitions such as Sydney's Biennale, Tasmania's Dark Mofo and the Venice Biennale and prizes such as the Miles Franklin and Archibald.

Arts policy remained a hot topic. Our experts analysed the impact of the federal budget and the Australia Council for the Arts' cuts in funding to journals such as *Meanjin* and leading theatre groups. They also wrote widely about the importance of the arts to a vibrant, multicultural society.

Stand-out stories examined issues such as terror plots in film and TV; the cartoons of Bill Leak; the question of whether Australia was invaded and the untold story of the 1966 Wave Hill Walk-Off.

Other major news events included the deaths of David Bowie, Prince and Leonard Cohen, and the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Bob Dylan.

Suzy Freeman-Greene, arts + culture editor  
Madeline de Gabriele, deputy arts + culture editor

### High impact articles

*Friday essay: How Shakespeare helped shape Germaine Greer's feminist masterpiece*, Rachel Buchanan, University of Melbourne

*Friday essay: the Australian Mosque*, Sam Bowker, Charles Sturt University

*Weighing up the evidence for the 'Historical Jesus'*. Raphael Lataster, University of Sydney

*Survival of the fittest: the changing shapes and sizes of Olympic athletes*. Tim Olds, University of South Australia

*Commodifying Banksy*. Alison Young, University of Melbourne

*Why The Simpsons has lost its way*. Travis Holland, Charles Sturt University

*Good vibrations: the role of music in Einstein's thinking*. Liam Viney, The University of Queensland

*In honouring Dylan, the Nobel Prize judges have made a category error*. Jen Webb, University of Canberra

*Questioning the 'miracles' of Saint Teresa*. Philip Almond, The University of Queensland

*Wrapping up the fantasy - how will Game of Thrones end?* Carolyne Larrington, University of Oxford





## HIGHLIGHTS: BUSINESS + ECONOMY

This year we launched our weekly Vital Signs wrap from UNSW Economics Professor Richard Holden, with the aim of contextualising important economic events and cutting through the noise of the data affecting global economies.

Business + economics editor Jenni Henderson brought together some of the best business thinking in a new Business Briefing podcast and we stepped up our coverage of the digital economy.

We also continued our coverage of major policy issues throughout the year, including tax avoidance and reform, the call for a banking royal commission, and the ongoing debate on the role of superannuation. Analysis we commissioned on the money banks make by not passing on interest rate cuts from the Reserve Bank was cited by NSW Labor MP Matt Thistlethwaite during House of Representatives Economics Committee hearings.

2016 saw the closure of Australia's car manufacturing industry and we brought together experts exploring what's next for both the workers and the broader manufacturing sector.

A piece on name-blind resumes triggered a segment on Channel Ten's The Project, sparking a pilot by a state government department.

We undertook a series exploring China's influence on everything from the products we buy to our universities, questioned what a "21st Century Government" should look like, and investigated the different uses for Blockchain technology as it gained headlines globally.

Charis Palmer, deputy editor, The Conversation, and business + economy editor  
Jenni Henderson, business + economy editor  
Josh Nicholas, business + economy editor

### High impact articles

*How to tell if your boss is a psychopath - and what to do about it.* David Tuffley, Griffith University

*The ugly story of Dick Smith, from float to failure.* Jeffrey Knapp, UNSW Australia

*Dick Smith couldn't compete and that is why it failed.* Sinclair Davidson, RMIT University

*Get out of my face! We're more antisocial in a shared office space.* Rachel Morrison, Auckland University of Technology

*Unhappy workplaces look a lot like unhappy marriages, new research shows.* Irit Alony, University of Wollongong

*The backlash against open-plan offices: segmented space.* Libby Sander, Bond University

*If media companies do block VPN sites, you can build your own Personal Cloud VPN.* David Glance, University of Western Australia

*How Kmart ate Target: a story of retail cannibalism.* Gary Mortimer, Queensland University of Technology

*Changes to the pension asset test will ripple through the economy.* Warren McKeown, University of Melbourne

*Why special tax breaks for seniors should go.* John Daley, Brendan Coates, William Young, Grattan Institute

## HIGHLIGHTS: EDUCATION

This year's coverage was dominated by the resurfacing of two familiar debates around university fee deregulation and Gonski funding for schools. Following the election, we covered debates around whether students should pay different fees for different courses, if the ATAR is still fit for purpose, improving equity, and reforming the student loans system.

The government's decision to not continue funding the final two years of Gonski sparked huge debate. Looking at the evidence, we fact checked whether education spending has actually increased; why the Gonski model was corrupted; who was to blame; and how and where such money should be spent.

We found new angles to debates that cropped up in the news around the overfunding of private schools; linking welfare payments to school attendance; teaching sex education; private VET providers; and improving early childhood education.

Our series on disability discrimination looked at the concerning ways schools try to avoid enrolling students with disabilities. It tackled issues around misdiagnosis, funding, and parental rights.

Another series, called Better Teachers, looked at how to improve teacher education in Australia. It covered areas including: teacher quality, assessment, and rural education. It featured some of Australia's most highly-regarded education experts. Many of these stories were also republished on the ABC.

For a podcast, we interviewed education expert John Hattie about how to improve the quality of education in Australian schools, as well as education minister Simon Birmingham around his plans for education.

And we were humbled when The Australian Council for Educational Leaders presented us a media award for outstanding coverage of education issues.

Claire Shaw, education editor

### High impact articles

*Why universities should get rid of PowerPoint and why they won't.* Paul Ralph, University of Auckland

*Which students are most likely to drop out of university?* Gavin Moodie, RMIT University

*Debunking common myths about raising bilingual children.* Mark Antoniou, Western Sydney University

*From tiger to free-range parents: what research says about pros and cons of popular parenting styles.* Rebecca English, Queensland University of Technology

*Togs or swimmers? Why Australians use different words to describe the same things.* Jill Vaughan, Katie Jepson, Rosey Billington, University of Melbourne

*What's the best, most effective way to take notes?* Claire Brown, Victoria University

*Why some kids can't spell and why spelling tests won't help.* Misty Adoniou, University of Canberra

*Genes can have up to 80% influence on students' academic performance.* Brian Byrne, University of New England, Katrina Grasby, University of New England  
Richard Olson, University of Colorado,

*Why screen time before bed is bad for children.* Sarah Loughran, University of Wollongong

*Ten types of PhD supervisor relationships - which is yours?* Susanna Chamberlain, Griffith University





## HIGHLIGHTS: ENVIRONMENT + ENERGY

One of our saddest duties this year was to report on the unprecedented coral bleaching that hit the Great Barrier Reef in March and April. Our coverage included scientific updates on the extent of bleaching, as well as a poignant photo essay, an attribution study of the role played by climate change, and an analysis of inaccuracies in other media outlets' coverage.

With the federal government signing off on a new marine reserves plan, we ran a series looking at the issue in depth and asking whether it is enough to protect Australia's ocean life.

Our federal election coverage posed several key questions of the Turnbull government, including the need for electricity market reform. That issue was highlighted by September's statewide blackout in South Australia, one of the year's biggest energy stories. Amid the blame game that erupted about renewable energy, we provided authoritative, sober analysis of cause and effect. When the Hazelwood coal power station's closure was announced in November, we did so again.

Climate was constantly on our news agenda, with the Paris Agreement entering into force, the tail end of a strong El Nino event, and our series of articles on future natural hazards for Australia.

On a lighter note, we also ran series on gardening, and on the 'hidden housemates' who live in our homes.

And the fact half a million people read a story about reinforced concrete proves how our authors continue to find engaging ways to write on all sorts of topics.

Michael Hopkin, environment + energy editor  
James Whitmore, deputy environment + energy editor

### High impact articles

*Why you should never put a goldfish in a park pond... or down the toilet.* Joy Becker, University of Sydney

*The problem with reinforced concrete.* Guy Keulemans, UNSW Australia

*Sea-level rise has claimed five whole islands in the Pacific: first scientific evidence.* Simon Albert, The University of Queensland, Alistair Grinham, The University of Queensland, Badin Gibbes, The University of Queensland, Javier Leon, University of the Sunshine Coast, John Church, CSIRO,

*Hidden housemates: Australia's huge and hairy huntsman spiders.* Linda S. Rayor, Cornell University

*22 ways to cut your energy bills (before spending on solar panels).* Tim Forcey, University of Melbourne

*We have almost certainly blown the 1.5-degree global warming target.* Andrew King, University of Melbourne, Benjamin J. Henley, University of Melbourne

*How a single word sparked a four-year saga of climate fact-checking and blog backlash.* Joelle Gergis, University of Melbourne

*How we rediscovered 'extinct' giant tortoises in the Galápagos Islands – and how to save them.* Luciano Beheregaray, Flinders University, Adalgisa 'Gisella' Caccone, Yale University

*What is going on with India's weather?* Sarah Perkins-Kirkpatrick, UNSW Australia, Andrew King, University of Melbourne, Geert Jan van Oldenborgh, Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute

*Coral bleaching comes to the Great Barrier Reef as record-breaking global temperatures continue.* Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, Tyrone Ridgway, The University of Queensland



## HIGHLIGHTS: HEALTH + MEDICINE

2016 saw the roll-out of the much-anticipated National Disability Insurance Scheme and government reviews of health insurance, Medicare items and primary care. Health and the future of Medicare also played a big part in the election campaigns of both major parties.

We launched a new editorial product debunking sensational health research reports such as chocolate improving brain function and paracetamol in pregnancy leading to misbehaving kids. Our new Science or Snakeoil series tested health products and whether or not they live up to their claims. We looked at A2 milk, liver detoxes and popular weight loss products.

We also covered big health issues like baby deaths in Bacchus Marsh, chemotherapy underdosing and the psychotic side effects of common asthma medication.

We introduced a new series on common, new and illicit drugs called Weekly Dose, and a series looking at unusual health conditions. Our weekly consumer Health Check series continued with articles on why we get dizzy, whether man flu is real and how long sex normally lasts.

Areas of in-depth coverage included the gut, how our brain controls our functions, coping with mortality, how Australians die, the evolution of diseases, and comprehensive looks at conditions found in women, men and children.

One of our most important projects this year was an interactive body map showing how various lifestyle factors affect our risk of cancer.

Alexandra Hansen, health + medicine editor  
Fron Jackson-Webb, health + medicine editor  
Sarah Keenihan, life sciences editor  
Anna Evangeli, deputy health + medicine editor  
Sasha Petrova, assistant health + medicine editor

### High impact articles

*Lynch syndrome explainer: a common cancer risk few have heard of.* Sharron O'Neill, UNSW Australia, Natalie Taylor, Macquarie University

*What's in a milestone? Understanding your child's development.* Chris Elliot, UNSW Australia, Con Papadopoulos, UNSW Australia

*Interactive body map: what really gives you cancer?* Emil Jeyaratnam, Sasha Petrova, The Conversation

*Ten myths about smoking that will not die.* Simon Chapman, University of Sydney

*Psychology of a paedophile: why are some people attracted to children?* Xanthe Mallett, University of New England

*Four common myths about exercise and weight loss.* Corneel Vandelanotte, CQUniversity Australia

*Does cannabis cause mental illness?* Peter Gates, UNSW Australia

*You can thaw and refreeze meat: five food safety myths busted.* Cathy Moir, CSIRO

*Sugar may be as damaging to the brain as extreme stress or abuse.* Jayanthi Maniam, Margaret Morris, UNSW Australia

*Here's why we don't have a vaccine for Zika (and other mosquito-borne viruses).* Suresh Mahalingam, Griffith University, Michael Rolph, Griffith University





## HIGHLIGHTS: POLITICS + SOCIETY

Rarely has there been a dull moment in politics and society this year. After a shaky start to the year from the new Turnbull government, we found ourselves heading to the polls for a double-dissolution election in early July, during which we published many outstanding pieces from our authors, led by chief political correspondent Michelle Grattan, on the state of the nation and what the future might -- should -- look like.

On the policy front we published many pieces on the ongoing row over section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act and freedom of speech; the ongoing battle of how to deal with asylum seekers; and a stoush between the Attorney-General and the then-Solicitor-General that led to the latter's resignation.

In collaboration with our colleagues at The Conversation UK, we covered the UK referendum to exit the European Union, and the implications of Brexit in the region and globally.

And that was all before we got to the United States, whose people unexpectedly elected Donald Trump to be their next President.

In the aftermath we looked at the implications of Trump's victory for the US and the world, how he might shape the Asia-Pacific region, the role the media played in his ascendancy and how the polls got it all so wrong.

On the cities front we focused on how cities are responding to challenges such as climate change and population pressures on resources and services. Most competing "global cities" aspire to be more resilient, sustainable and liveable.

Yet the problems of unaffordable housing and transport congestion seem a world away from the technology-driven promise of smart cities. Questions of grossly unequal access, opportunity and wealth across cities continued to occupy our authors.

Amanda Dunn, politics + society editor  
Michael Courts, deputy politics + society editor  
John Watson, cities + policy editor

### High impact articles

*He may have insulted Obama, but Duterte held up a long-hidden looking glass to the US.* Adele Webb, University of Sydney

*Brexit stage right: what Britain's decision to leave the EU means for Australia.* Ben Wellings, Monash University

*When terror goes viral it's up to us to prevent chaos.* Brian McNair, Queensland University of Technology

*Western Australia provides a masterclass in what not to do with a resources boom.* Mark Beeson, University of Western Australia

*Five ways a Trump presidency would impact Australia - for the worse.* Benjamin Isakhan, Zim Nwokora, Deakin University,

*Australia is in danger of being swamped by Muslims? The numbers tell a different story.* Alex Reilly, University of Adelaide

*Urban density matters – but what does it mean?* Kim Dovey, University of Melbourne, Elek Pafka, University of Melbourne

*Even if he keeps the top job, Malcolm Turnbull's troubles have only just begun.* Carol Johnson, University of Adelaide

*US election: how did the polls get it so wrong?* Mark Balnaves, University of Newcastle

*Why does international condemnation on human rights mean so little to Australia?* Amy Maguire, University of Newcastle

## HIGHLIGHTS: SCIENCE + TECHNOLOGY

One of the biggest discoveries of the year was the detection of gravitational waves by an international team of scientists, including several from Australia. We worked with our Conversation colleagues overseas on a number of articles to reflect the international nature of the research. We published from experts involved in the research and those reacting to the discovery and what it means for future research in this exciting area.

Cybercrime dominated the headlines and we provided expert analysis on the issue, including scrutiny of the government's Cyber Security Strategy. We explored some of the ways people and organisations fall for cybercrime as well as preventative advice.

Automation is at the forefront of much research and we looked at the move to more driverless cars, and the ongoing debate over autonomous weapons.

Research on artificial intelligence continues and we looked at the challenges and the breakthroughs. We also marked the 60th anniversary of the first computer in an Australian university with a series on how computing impacts on many aspects our lives today.

We also covered the debacle over attempts to get Australians to complete their census online.

Other highlights include coverage of the discovery of new planets, an expanding universe, earthquakes and tsunamis, submarines, the NBN, a new dinosaur and early Indigenous life in Australia, a look at science in the kitchen and the rise and fall of Pokemon Go.

In recognition of the efforts of all science and technology editors, The Conversation was listed by RealClearScience as one of the top 10 go-to resources for science journalism in 2016.

Tim Dean, senior science + technology editor  
Michael Lund, science + technology editor

### High impact articles

*Paying a heavy price for loving the Neanderthals.* Darren Curnoe, UNSW Australia

*Giant monster Megalodon sharks lurking in our oceans: be serious!* John Long, Flinders University

*Humans are still evolving but in ways that might surprise you.* Darren Curnoe, UNSW Australia

*The trolley dilemma: would you kill one person to save five?* Laura D'Olimpio, University of Notre Dame Australia

*The real reason more women don't code.* Karin Verspoor, University of Melbourne

*Explainer: what is the dark web?* David Glance, University of Western Australia

*The human penis is a puzzler, no bones about it.* Lauren Reid, Durham University

*Bacteria found to thrive better in space than on Earth.* Ivy Shih, The Conversation

*What went wrong with Pokemon Go? Three lessons from its plummeting player numbers.* Mark Humphery-Jenner, UNSW Australia

*Hacking the terror suspect's iPhone: what the FBI can do now Apple says 'no'.* Georg Thomas, Charles Sturt University





## HIGHLIGHTS: **FACTCHECK**

2016 was a federal election year in Australia, and FactCheck was there to meet the challenge.

The Conversation hired a Deputy FactCheck Editor on a short-term contract to help check contentious claims throughout the marathon election campaign, publishing an average of three to four FactCheck articles a week during the unusually long eight-week campaign period. We checked assertions from all sides of politics on the key election issues, including Medicare, asylum seekers, negative gearing, and the state of the economy.

We continued our collaboration with ABC TV's Q&A program, which brought many new readers to the site thanks to Q&A's social media editors frequently sharing our content and host Tony Jones' on-air requests for viewers to send their ideas into The Conversation.

One highlight was RMIT's Yee-Fui Ng Q&A FactCheck on a claim that a week's worth of Newstart is equal to what a politician can claim for one night in Canberra, which was widely shared on social media. Another well-read FactCheck Q&A this year was ANU's Clark Jones' piece on Pauline Hanson's claims about the Grand Muffin of Australia.

FactCheck was also at the centre of our Friends of The Conversation campaign this year, and inspired many people to donate. As a result, we were able to hire a permanent Deputy FactCheck Editor, Lucinda Beaman.

With the demise of the ABC's FactCheck unit, we take more seriously than ever our duty to factcheck statements by politicians and other influential public figures. There's never been a better time to check the facts.

Sunanda Creagh, FactCheck editor  
Lucinda Beaman, deputy FactCheck editor

### **High impact articles**

*FactCheck: Is 30% of Northern Territory farmland and 22% of Tasmanian farmland foreign-owned?* Erin Smith, University of the Sunshine Coast, Bill Pritchard, University of Sydney

*Election FactCheck: are many refugees illiterate and innumerate?* Georgina Ramsay, University of Newcastle

*Election FactCheck Q&A: has the NBN been delayed?* Rod Tucker, University of Melbourne

*FactCheck Q&A: what are the real numbers on refugees and other migrants coming to Australia?* Khanh Hoang, Australian National University

*Election FactCheck: is the Australian Sex Party right about religious organisations, tax and record-keeping?* Bronwen Dalton, University of Technology Sydney

*FactCheck Q&A: are one in three age pensioners living under the poverty line?* Rafal Chomik, UNSW Australia

*Election FactCheck Q&A: is global demand for coal still going through the roof?* Lynette Molyneaux, The University of Queensland

*Election FactCheck Q&A: is it true Australia's unemployment payment level hasn't increased in over 20 years?* Peter Whiteford, Australian National University

*Election FactCheck Q&A: is Australia among the lowest-taxing countries in the OECD?* Helen Hodgson, Curtin University

*Election FactCheck: Has the Coalition presided over the most sustained fall in Australian living standards since records began?* Peter Whiteford, Australian National University

## HIGHLIGHTS: MULTIMEDIA

2016 saw an increased shift to data and interactive graphics, as well as more original illustrative content. Our interactive cancer body map, looking at lifestyle factors that increase your risk of cancer, was a popular highlight, attracting 1.5 million readers.

For the Australian election we produced interactive projects, including a profile of all ministers and shadow ministers, and a summary of all key policy positions of the government and opposition. On election day, coverage included a popular summary of results page, which had over 50,000 views.

Post-election, we published a series with Grattan Institute that included interactive charts highlighting the challenges facing the Turnbull government.

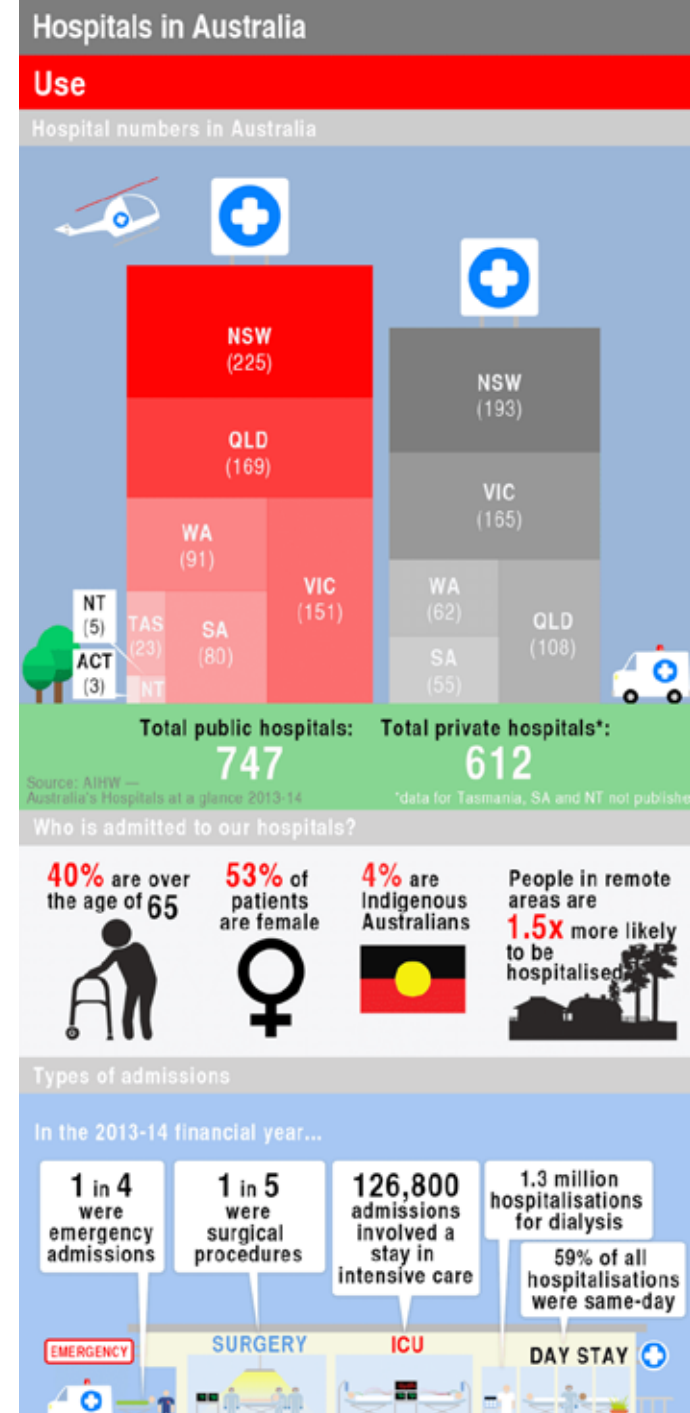
Still in politics, the three federal budget infographics were key features of our budget coverage, and their ability to provide complicated information in a clear and summarised format was popular with readers.

Our Speaking With podcast series continued to perform well, and featured regularly on iTunes' top 100 podcasts within the news and politics section.

We also introduced two new podcast series: Change Agents, with Swinburne University, and Race to the White House, in collaboration with University of Sydney's US Studies Centre and 2ser Radio.

And, finally, our gut microbiome animation proved popular, and we hope to replicate the ideas in a unique editorial product next year.

Emil Jeyaratnum, multimedia editor  
Wes Mountain, deputy multimedia editor



## HIGHLIGHTS: COMMUNITY

We want The Conversation to be a place for intelligent, constructive discussion.

We've spent more time engaging in the comments ourselves and reinforcing our community standards. This has been coupled with a more proactive approach to closing comments, if only temporarily, on subjects we know cause problems.

We expanded our Community Council – a volunteer group of around 30 moderators made up of readers and authors – adding five new readers to the group.

We've also made an effort to increase the transparency of our moderation processes. We've published articles on areas like off-topic comments, trolls, gender discrimination and how we lock accounts. This has allowed us to have discussions about our moderation and its nuances.

Our Author Q&As continued to prove popular with commenters and authors alike. We reached Q&A number 200, up from just over 100 this time last year.

This year we've seen more constructive discussions happening more often on our articles. And our commenters have noticed: one recently posted that "I think of all the online places I visit, The Conversation is the most respectful place for discussion".

Thanks to all commenters, authors, community council members and readers who have contributed to our community.

Cory Zanoni, community manager

“ I appreciated the moderation of the comments section. My article, 'Friday essay: the Australian Mosque' was always going to be controversial. I think it's important that on-topic questions are answered, and found the author Q&A valuable. Thanks for your support of this article, I'll look forward to submitting a new piece in the future.



Sam Bowker,  
Lecturer in Art  
History and Visual  
Culture, Charles  
Sturt University

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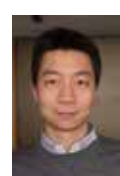
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