

# THE CONVERSATION

2015 Stakeholder Report



# FROM THE EDITOR

It's been a big year for The Conversation. Our main project of expanding our global newsroom is taking shape faster than we thought possible.

In May, we launched into Africa working with 9 countries based at the University of Witswatersrand, Johannesburg. The African team are doing a wonderful job adapting The Conversation model to address the issues and concerns of developing countries.

In September, we launched into France. This translation was a huge job for our Carlton based software engineers. Our team in France are based at the Sorbonne and have the initial support of 33 universities.

During the recent Paris attacks they provided readers with up-close and personal coverage. And they are working with the rest of The Conversation editors on the Paris climate conference.

Meanwhile our US site turned one in October and is powering ahead with plans to open editing hubs on the west coast and mid-west.

The UK site goes from strength to strength and now has 62 university supporters.

We are well on the way to creating the world's largest virtual Newsroom with nearly 30,000 specialist authors and 90 editors. We reach an audience of over 23 million a month with over 22,000 other media sites republishing articles. All free for everyone to access, use, share and republish. With the help of the Myer Foundation our Jakarta editor, Proditia Sabarini, has been expanding our coverage of Indonesia as well as working toward creating The Conversation Indonesia.

Thanks finally to all our Friends of The Conversation who gave support, funding partners, our authors and readers. Without you...

**Andrew Jaspan**  
*Editor and Executive Director*

## FROM THE CHAIR

Thank you to my fellow board members and The Conversation team for continuing to disseminate scholarly expertise to a large global audience. We are committed to enabling and encouraging improved public debate based on evidence.

Our global knowledge network has expanded this year. It is great to see an Australian idea grow so rapidly domestically and be expanding globally, now across four continents.

Friends and partners have helped us improve our coverage in Australia.

The continued support of the Commonwealth Bank has been crucial in the development of our technical platform.

Funding from the Federal Government came to a close this year, we are very grateful for the support provided. Over the next three years the Victorian Government will be helping The Conversation by providing vital funding and we thank them for believing in what we do. The City of Melbourne and the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation have provided funding for 2016 for an editor to cover the latest thinking and research on cities. The Australian Cancer Research Foundation is funding an extra editor to add to the popular articles published by our Health and Medicine team. The Copyright Agency has allowed us to run our

highly regarded intern program. Our pro-bono legal advisors, Cors Chambers Westgarth, provide invaluable support and guidance, especially as we navigate global expansion.

In 2015 we started new work to improve our engagement metrics and to allow our authors and universities to demonstrate public engagement and impact. We provide rich dashboards and analytics and have more planned for 2016.

Thank you everyone for your continued support, ideas, and readership. You have contributed to a better conversation.

**Robert Johanson**  
*Chair, Board of Directors*

### 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.

# 2015 IN REVIEW

TC editions in AU, UK and US.

2m users onsite each month and a reach of 17m through creative commons republication.

15,000 authors, 76,000 newsletter subscribers.

Edith Cowan University joins as a member.

Australian Cancer Research Foundation (ACRF) joins as a partner.

Celebrate our 4th anniversary.

La Trobe and UNE renew membership.

Launch of The Conversation Africa.

Federal budget coverage.

Annual "Friends of The Conversation" campaign results in 3,200 supporters.

CDU renews membership.

January

February

March

April

May

June

New formatting options available on comments.

USC renews membership.

UNSW Australia joins as a member.

JCU renews membership.

Central Queensland University joins as a member.

UWA renews membership.

New responsive article page design goes live.

Launch of Research Expert Database, giving businesses, government and the public better access to experts.

ACU, Monash, Murdoch, WSU and Melbourne renew membership.

Launch of The Conversation France.

Victorian Government announces 3 years of financial support.

ANU, Curtin, Griffith, QUT, UTS, USyd, CSIRO and RMIT renew membership.

Launch of 2015 Yearbook: Politics, policy + chance of change at Parliament House.

Canberra, UNDA, UTas, Wollongong, the Harry Perkins Institute and Newcastle renew membership.

July

August

September

October

November

December

In collaboration with ABC, we start FactCheck QandA.

Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) joins as a member.

Deakin and UQ renew membership.

The Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation and City of Melbourne announce funding for a new editorial desk, Cities.

Flinders, USQ and UniSA renew membership.

Swinburne and VU renew membership.

2.7m users onsite each month, and a reach of 23m through creative commons republication.

30,000 authors, 94,000 newsletter subscribers.

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



## GLOBAL NEWSROOM

The Conversation is a global knowledge project. We now have 5 international editions – Australia, UK, US, Africa and France – together representing one of the world's largest virtual newsrooms of 90 editors and 30,000 experts.

We have a new approach to global journalism: cross-cultural and borderless. The world is increasingly complex and interconnected, bringing many challenges and opportunities.

Each of our local operations serves its market but through our global newsroom we also bring them together to address and publish on the world's big challenges such as water, food, energy, climate, migration, disease, security, future of cities and rural communities. That way we are able to provide both country and global perspectives to readers.

All international editions operate under a licence and are bound by our editorial codes of conduct. They are all non profit and independently funded by foundations and universities in those countries.

### New launches

This year we launched into Africa, and also France.

TC-Africa launched in May 2015, and is supported by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Barclays Africa, Knight Foundation, and the National Research Foundation. It is endorsed by 20+ universities across the continent. Hosted by the University of Witwatersrand and University of Western Cape in South Africa, the team will launch hubs in East and West Africa over time.

TC-France launched in September 2015, and is supported by ADEME, Conférence des Présidents d'Université, Institut Universitaire de France, Irsteda, Sciences et Lettres Research University Paris, Université de Lorraine, Université Paris Saclay, Université Sorbonne Paris Cité. The team is hosted by Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires.

TC-US celebrated its first anniversary this year and is gearing up to cover US election 2016. And TC-UK celebrated its second anniversary, also covering a national election and introducing the popular FactCheck to readers.

We will have more news soon about launches in 2016.



# MEMBERSHIP

Research institutions support The Conversation by paying an annual membership fee.

Member universities access benefits, including metrics and dashboards to track and benchmark social engagement and impact.

Every morning we send media teams at member universities an expert call out, which provides partners the opportunity to put forward their academics for commission on that day's stories.

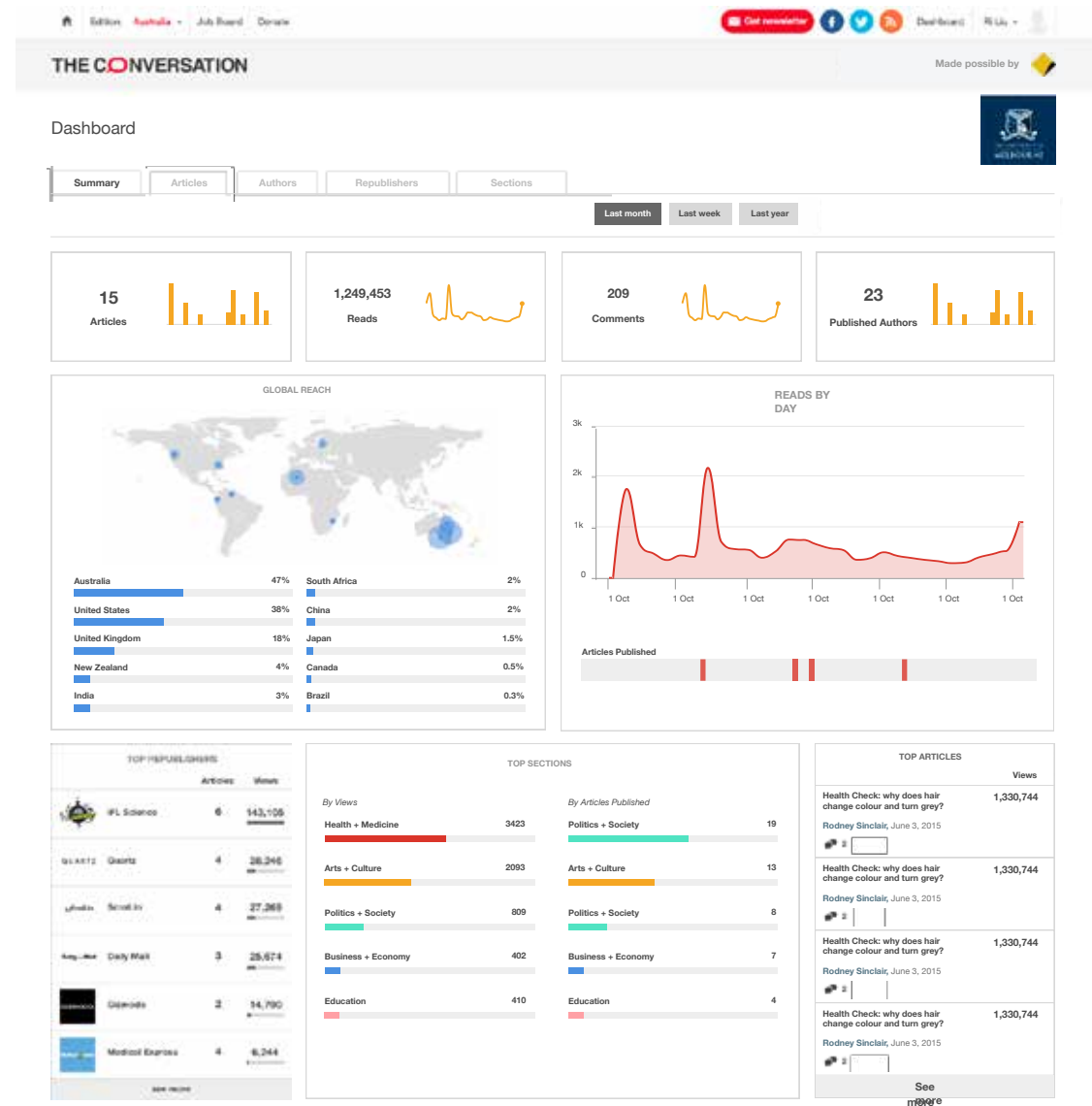
Other member benefits include designation on the site, free event listings on article pages and in the daily newsletter, on campus seminars and training, access to internship programs and discounted job listings.

There are 6 universities still to join. We are very hopeful we can persuade them to support us in 2016. All funding is allocated to the editors who work with the academic authors.

## MEMBER BENEFITS

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

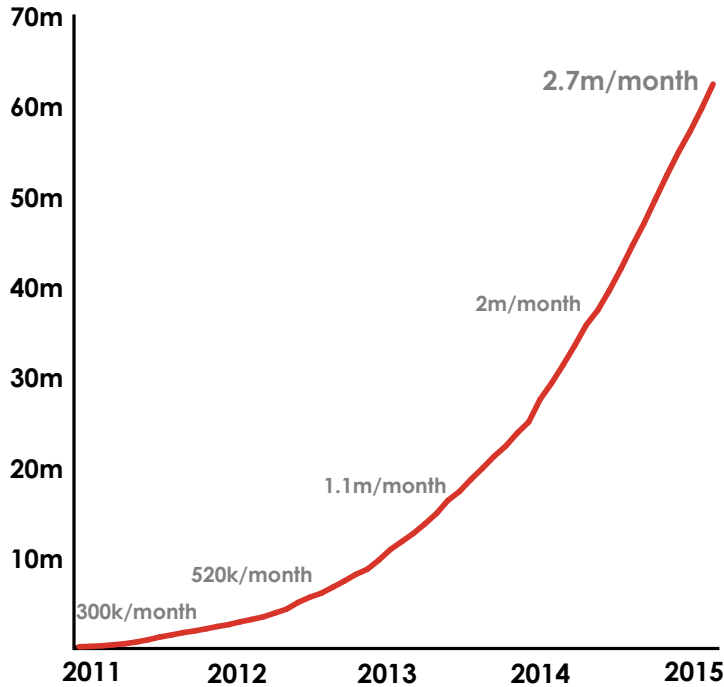
## INSTITUTION METRICS



# A GROWING READERSHIP

Our monthly readership is 2.7 million users onsite, with a reach of 23 million through creative commons republication.

Rapid growth has continued this year, attributable to consolidation of our global newsroom, the launch of our France and Africa editions, and the growing recognition of our place in the Australian media landscape.



We continue to reach a general-public audience. 56% of readers are under 45 years old, and more than 80% are non-academic.



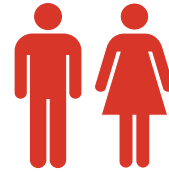
80% non-academic



66% employed full or part time  
22% studying full or part time



83% have an undergraduate degree or higher



49% male, and 51% female



56% are under 45



19% academia  
13% gov, policy or public sector  
13% teachers  
10% healthcare/medical

Around 50% of our readers are from outside Australia. The breakdown is:



1. Australia



2. United States



3. United Kingdom



4. Canada



5. India



6. France



7. South Africa



8. New Zealand



9. Germany

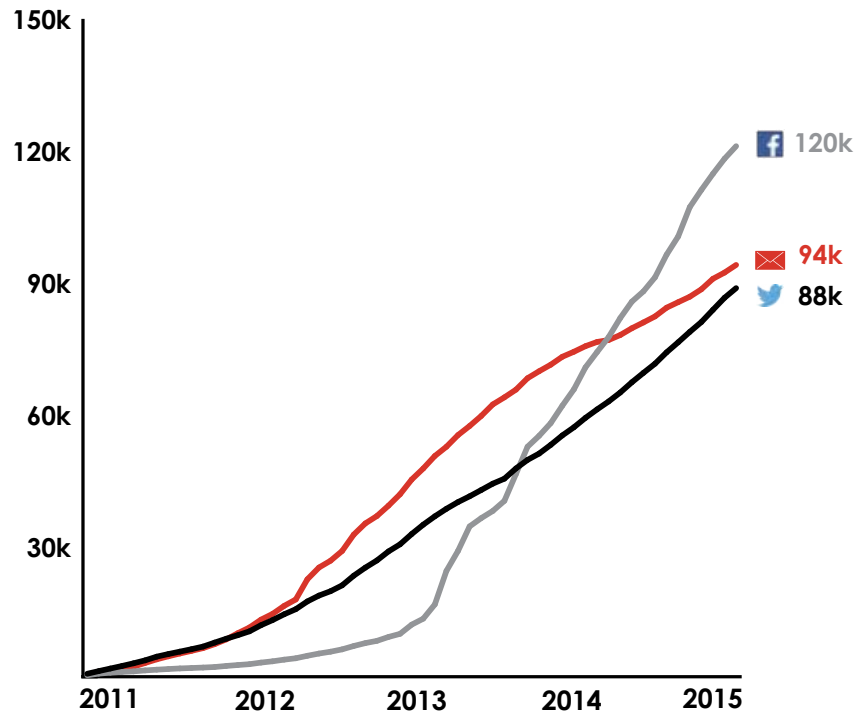


10. Singapore



# SOCIAL SHARING

Our newsletter and social media channels are our main sources of traffic referral, and these have all grown significantly in 2015.



Loneliness can be deadly (and changing that isn't just a matter of having people around you). [theconversation.com/the-deadly-tru...](http://theconversation.com/the-deadly-tru...)



**The deadly truth about loneliness**  
The unpleasant feelings of loneliness are subjective. Researchers have found they are less related to the amount of time spent alone and more related to the quality...  
[theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com)

RETWEETS: 44 | LIKES: 53

**The Conversation**  
14 September · 1h

Yep, it's true: Knitting and neuroscience have more in common than you might think.  
<https://theconversation.com/knitting-your-way-to-a-healthier...>

**Knitting your way to a healthier, happier mind**

206,143 people reached

896 Likes · 255 Comments · 1.5k Shares

ICYMI: @Brianmcnair's excellent analysis on #qanda boycott  
[theconversation.com/boycotting-qan...](http://theconversation.com/boycotting-qan...)

"Politicians who boycott media organisations with whom they disagree politically rarely come out looking good.... The refusal to engage with the public on live TV is not just counter-productive for the Coalition, it is profoundly undemocratic.

— Brian McNair  
Professor of Journalism, QUT

RETWEETS: 129 | LIKES: 71

15:58 AEST · 7 Oct 2015

**The Conversation**  
15 November at 18:22 · 1h

You've seen your newsfeed flooded with a French flag filter for Facebook profile pictures, but not as many Syrian flags to show solidarity with the victims of terrorist attacks in that country.

The argument goes that the Paris attacks are unfairly given more coverage than similar events in other places around the world – such as last Thursday's bombings in Beirut, which killed 44 people, or the shooting of 147 people at a university in Kenya in April, to name just two examples.

And it's raising questions about the proportionality of news coverage when it comes to reporting deadly events.

Who's to "blame" for this disproportionate coverage? The media? Readers?

**Disproportionate coverage of Paris attacks is not just the media's fault**

To simply see media should report in equal amounts on such deaths, regardless of where they occurred, may be nice from a normative perspective...

130,564 people reached

888 Likes · 93 Comments · 40k Shares

## MEDIA + REPUBLICATION

We believe in the free-flow of information, which is why we publish under a Creative Commons license that allows republication with attribution.

Every month, The Conversation's content is read on hundreds of sites that republish our articles – from large media, stakeholder groups, large niche sites, and smaller bloggers – where it reaches a large global audience of 23 million.

Some 22,000 sites republish our content.

By allowing media and others to freely republish our content we're helping to share knowledge with the widest possible audience. And by sharing our content with media, we're supplying increasingly thinned-out newsrooms with expert content that is protected by a charter of independence.

Media frequently use us as a source of ideas and talent: some 60% of authors receive media follow up as a result of writing.

“ **One big advantage of The Conversation is that its articles are not hidden behind a pay wall and so are open to everyone.**

– Gregory Melleuish, Uni of Wollongong

“ **I did an interview with ABC Canberra today and will do one for Triple J tomorrow. Really good to have the interest in the piece.**

– Jane Wangmann, UTS

“ **UQ's authors have been republished in major media outlets worldwide; attracted new academic and industry collaborations; and seen higher citations of their research. The Conversation is a fabulous way for us to create change globally.**

– Carolyn Varley, Corporate Relations Manager, UQ

“ **I've done radio interviews, been republished in The SMH and got a book deal with Penguin.**

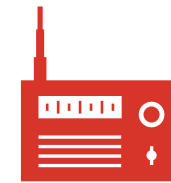
– Brock Bastion, UNSW Australia



**60%** of authors contacted for media follow up



**14%** of authors invited to speak at conferences



**77%** contacted for radio



**8%** received business requests for consultation



**78%** discussed with friends



**15%** contacted for research collaboration

CREATIVE COMMONS REPUBLICATION

23m  
reads / month

22k  
republishers



## HIGH IMPACT ENGAGEMENT



“ The Conversation has given me an unexpected and lasting platform for exposure. Off the back of my articles, I secured a book deal with Cambridge publishing; was featured alongside six of the nation’s top education experts in another book about the transformation of education in Australia. A university in Japan used my work for an entrance exam, and teachers are using my work as a basis for classroom discussion. Each time I write I have a handful of follow up media interviews. All this has really helped build my public profile.

Misty Adoniou, Senior Lecturer in Language, Literacy and TESL.  
University of Canberra.



“ I was amazed by the response to my article on Papua New Guinea’s worsening drought, including seeing it republished by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. I really appreciated how you helped craft it into a good piece that’s been read by policy practitioners around the world, including in the US, PNG, UK and beyond.

Dr Mike Bourke, Visiting Fellow,  
Australian National University



“ Even months after writing I’m getting national exposure for my work. Yesterday I had the trifecta of radio, TV and print with ABC News and The Age. Today it’s been SBS TV and the Financial Review. In the space of a week, UQ Media estimated my interaction with the media was worth over \$420,000 in marketing to the University. All of them found me through The Conversation. From this, I was invited to provide a private briefing to federal parliament’s Joint Committee on Treaties.

Dr David Adamson, Senior Research Officer,  
The University of Queensland

## HIGH IMPACT ENGAGEMENT



“ In my 30-year career I’ve taught about 10,000 students – yet in just the past few years, more than 100,000 people have read my articles on molecular biology in *The Conversation*. Thanks to *The Conversation*’s metrics, for the first time I know precisely what attention my work is receiving, here and internationally.

Professor Merlin Crossley, Dean of Science, UNSW Australia



“ My *Conversation* articles have directly led to invitations to speak at North American universities, including Columbia University and the University of British Columbia. My circle of professional and other contacts has also expanded.

David Hodgkinson, Associate Professor of Law, University of Western Australia



“ It is astounding how popular this article was, and so gratifying to see my research get such a large, global exposure. Within a couple of days it had 1.6 million readers, had gone viral in social media, and was republished on *I F\*ing love science*, CNN, and Quartz. My university ran an article on the intranet about the story going viral. There’s obviously public appetite for consumer-interest topics that are backed by rigorous evidence and clearly explained, but I had no idea the article would bring so many big, positive outcomes.

Amanda Salis, NHMRC Senior Research Fellow in the Boden Institute of Obesity, Nutrition, Exercise & Eating Disorders, University of Sydney.

## INTERN PROGRAM

Twenty-three interns from 16 universities went through our popular internship program this year.

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.

Our graduating interns have secured jobs with The Conversation, ABC, The Australian, The Age, state government, universities, and other short-term industry contracts.

“ I got to go to events and meetings where I met other great journos and learned about new research in my section.

“ The experience really helped me critically develop my journalistic ethics and integrity.

“ I enjoyed the varied learning opportunities provided.

“ Commissioning and editing articles was an invaluable learning experience.

“ I was given responsibility for a project, which really helped give me a sense of purpose.

“ It is one of the best internships I've ever done.

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**CULTURAL  
FUND**





# JOBS, EVENT LISTINGS + NEWSLETTER SPONSORSHIP

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

## Jobs Board

Our job board is a place where experts find jobs, particularly in teaching, higher education, health, media, policy, and government sectors.

11,000 jobs have been posted on the jobs board from 300 organisations. Further article integration has allowed jobs and events to feature prominently on articles.

## Events

Event listings are primarily a member benefit. They allow symposiums and talks to be advertised alongside articles by academics whose institutes are hosting the event, as well as on our Events page.

## Newsletter sponsorship

We now have 94,000 subscribers to our daily newsletter. Interest in sponsoring the newsletter has grown considerably in 2015. Universities, research institutions, libraries, museums, and partners have all taken advantage of newsletter sponsorship this year.



## HIGHLIGHTS: ARTS + CULTURE

In 2015 we continued to run an ongoing series pulling together a wide range of voices and areas of expertise on Religion + Mythology. To date that has seen us publish the Gospel of Jesus's Wife, witches, gender issues in Game of Thrones versus medieval understandings of gender, and the mythology underpinning the Star Wars movie franchise.

We also published a series – Writing History – on the issues and peculiarities of communicating history, whether fictionalised or within a more traditional, non-fictional framework. In a similar vein, theatre director and Professor of Creative Arts at Flinders University, Julian Meyrick, worked with us to produce an explanatory and discursive series: On Playwriting.

It was a big year for arts policy, with significant changes to funding – and the philosophy underpinning it – announced in May's federal budget. The announced creation of a National Program for Excellence in the Arts was a particular focus, both in terms of what it signalled for the Australia Council for the Arts and the hitherto "arm's length" nature of arts funding in Australia.

As details began to emerge of the new Book Council of Australia, we covered the implications of that new body on the local writing and publishing industry.

We covered a number of events and performances at major festivals, including at the Sydney Festival, Melbourne Festival, film festivals in both of those cities, and the Brisbane and Adelaide Festivals. Set piece art events, such as the Archibald Prize, Kibble Awards and Miles Franklin Award were firmly on our radar.

Elsewhere, we kept a close eye on gender and racism, and on Aboriginal Australia.

*Paul Dalgarno, section editor*  
*Madeleine De Gabriele, deputy section editor*

### Most-read articles

Jamming with your toddler: how music trumps reading for childhood development. *Liam Viney, The University of Queensland*

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

What might Pluto sound like? Our musical love affair with the cosmos. *Liam Viney, The University of Queensland*

The day I don't feel Australian? That would be Australia Day. *Chelsea Bond, Queensland University of Technology*

Not all graffiti is vandalism – let's rethink the public space debate. *Liam Miller, The University of Queensland*

Lego Pompeii creates less pomp and more yay in the museum. *Craig Barker, University of Sydney*

'Whitesplaining': what it is and how it works. *Catrina Elder, University of Sydney*

Why Conspiracy Theories Aren't Harmless Fun. *Patrick Stokes, Deakin University*

The rape scene in Brad Pitt's Fury no-one is talking about. *Melanie O'Brien, The University of Queensland*

No, feminism is not about choice. *Meagan Tyler, RMIT University*

## HIGHLIGHTS: BUSINESS + ECONOMY

Our federal budget coverage was our most ambitious to date, with widely-read news stories, infographics, expert panels, budget briefs (where we asked readers through Twitter to nominate questions they wanted our experts to answer), and a dedicated newsletter on budget night. We had our largest-ever team of editors in the Canberra "lock up", including Dr Warwick Smith from the University of Melbourne who joined chief political correspondent Michelle Grattan and our editors.

Our experts have given readers compelling analysis on a number of major business and economic policy reviews this year, including tax reform (through the tax white paper process), competition policy (headed by Professor Ian Harper), and an inquiry into Australia's financial system, led by David Murray. Meanwhile, the Federalism white paper process continues.

As Australia's economy has continued a pivot away from the resources boom, our experts have explained the intricacies and significance of the bilateral and multilateral trade deals signed by Australia, including free trade agreements with Korea, Japan and China, as well as the historic – and controversial – TransPacific Partnership.

Tax avoidance by multi-national companies has also been in the spotlight, as has reform of Australia's GST, and the role of superannuation.

Other highlights have included series on Australia's transitioning economy; the rise (and rise) of the sharing economy and companies such as Uber and Airbnb; and a series with our global colleagues on Beyond GDP.

*Helen Westerman, section editor*  
*Charis Palmer, deputy section editor*

### Most-read articles

No, it's not you: why 'wellness' isn't the answer to overwork. *Zoë Krupka, La Trobe University*

Defending the indefensible: myths about the gender pay gap. *Meg Smith, Western Sydney University*

Company chiefs with daughters make for kinder workplaces. *Henrik Cronqvist, University of Miami and Frank Yu, China Europe International Business School*

The 'Aldification' of Woolworths is destroying its value. *John Rice, University of New England and Nigel Martin, Australian National University*

Toxic boss at work? Here are some tips for coping. *Paula Brough and Vicki Webster, Griffith University*

The true state of Queensland's economy, without the spin. *Fabrizio Carmignani, Griffith University*

Unfazed by court cases, downloaders continue, but turn to hiding their tracks. *David Glance, University of Western Australia*

How the NBN could boost Australia's GDP by 2%. *Sascha Suessspeck and Leith Campbell, University of Melbourne*







## HIGHLIGHTS: EDUCATION

It was a tumultuous year in higher education, with the government's proposed fee deregulation policy forming the backdrop for much debate. We covered the issues extensively and featured vice chancellors, research on the benefits of public/private universities, and commissioned NATSEM to provide independent modeling of the fee deregulation scenarios. Additionally, we moved the debate forward with a series discussing what universities are for.

After revelations of academic dishonesty in Australian universities, we not only discussed the issues and allegations, but were one of few media organisations to discuss what these revelations could do to groups targeted in the reports, such as Chinese international students.

In collaboration with the ABC, we ran a series on how to go about choosing the right university for you.

We covered new research on why some children think they're more special than others, the confirmation that exams are a major source of adolescent stress, what attracts Chinese students to Australian universities, and the secret to being good at maths.

Other key coverage included parenting, discipline, childhood reading, and a popular series on language in Australia.

*Claire Shaw, section editor*

### Most-read articles

What is the secret to being good at maths? *Sally Andrews and Steson Lo, University of Sydney*

How to discipline your children without rewards or punishment. *Rebecca English, Queensland University of Technology*

How does your choice of university affect your future? *Andrew Norton, Grattan Institute and David Carroll, UNSW Australia*

'Chalk and talk' teaching might be the best way after all. *Kevin Donnelly, Australian Catholic University*

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

Orphanage trips by Aussie schools are doing more harm than good. *Karleen Gribble, Western Sydney University*

'Parents these days' are judged too harshly. *John Pickering, The University of Queensland*

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*

The way we teach most children to read sets them up to fail. *Pamela Snow, La Trobe University*

## HIGHLIGHTS: ENVIRONMENT + ENERGY

The year's coverage was dominated by December's United Nations climate summit in Paris, for which we produced extensive analysis in the run-up, then sent a team of editors and authors to the negotiations.

In coordination with our global colleagues, we analysed the climate pledges and policies of major nations including the United States, China, India, and Australia's new post-2020 climate target.

On the domestic front, we provided analysis on Australia's Energy White Paper, and the launch of government's Direct Action carbon policy, and the Abbott government's efforts to reduce the Renewable Energy Target.

Our authors from around the world wrote extensively on Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment.

As the United Nations spared Australia from global ignominy by deciding not to list the Great Barrier Reef as officially in danger, we ran a series analysing the various threats it still faces, from coal, to fishing, to farming.

Our series on climate futures and the changes to wildlife in response to climate change also highlighted the threats to Australian landscapes, as did our coverage of the El Niño.

We also covered new research on: the global warming 'hiatus', global forests, and Australia's "other reef" (in case you haven't heard of it, it's the Great Southern Reef, and is worth \$10bn a year).

Our energy coverage included a wide-ranging global series on the future of nuclear power, dealing with everything from Middle Eastern nuclear tensions to why it's so hard to get fusion power to work.

*Michael Hopkin, section editor*  
*James Whitmore, deputy section editor*

### Most-read articles

The Tesla battery heralds the beginning of the end for fossil fuels. *John Mathews, Macquarie University*

The science behind the Nepal earthquake. *Mike Sandiford, University of Melbourne, Kristin Morell, University of Victoria and CP Rajendran, Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research*

Ordering the vegetarian meal? There's more animal blood on your hands. *Mike Archer AM, UNSW Australia*

The rise and rise of the 2015 El Niño. *Agus Santoso, Andréa S. Taschetto, Matthew England and Shayne McGregor, UNSW Australia*

'Climate hacking' would be easy – that doesn't mean we should do it. *Erik van Sebille, Imperial College London and Katelijn Van Hende, UCL*

Killing whales for science: Japan is sent back to the drawing board. *Tony Press, University of Tasmania*

Ancient Aboriginal stories preserve history of a rise in sea level. *Patrick Nunn, University of the Sunshine Coast and Nick Reid, University of New England*

Despite decades of deforestation, the Earth is getting greener. *Pep Canadell, CSIRO, Albert Van Dijk, Australian National University and Yi Liu, UNSW Australia*

The Road to Paris: three myths about international climate talks. *Nick Rowley, University of Sydney*

Baobab trees trace the African diaspora across the Indian Ocean. *Haripriya Rangan, University of Melbourne and Karen L. Bell, Emory University*







## HIGHLIGHTS: HEALTH + MEDICINE

Our focus on health care reform continued in 2015 with new research investigating high-use consumer groups, unnecessary care and the unexpected consequences of the GP rebate freeze.

We examined the private health insurance industry with an infographic and series on why almost half of Australian have private health insurance, how "carrot and stick" policies have failed, and the options for reform.

Our ten-part series on human experimentation, in collaboration with colleagues in the UK and US, explored the chequered history of wartime experiments and how these wrongs shaped medical ethics.

We provided in-depth packages on: innovative options for tobacco control; how hormones affect our mood; and IVF and donor conception, including a reader-expert 'Your Questions Answered' forum.

Our weekly consumer Health Check series continued and generated popular discussion on food comas, whether your brain can be 'full', and why some people feel the cold more than others.

We welcomed two new columnists: Jayne Lucke, whose "Facts of Life" column reflects on sex, health and society; and Simon Chapman, whose "Smoke Signals" column provides much-needed plain speaking on public health.

Other highlights include coverage of: the hepatitis C berry scare; meat and bowel cancer risk; intimate partner violence; ice/crystal meth; mental health treatment; sex and pleasure later in life; and the role of country-of-origin food labels.

*Fron Jackson-Webb, section editor*  
*Alexandra Hansen, deputy section editor*  
*Sasha Petrova, researcher*

### Most-read articles

Health Check: the science of 'hangry', or why some people get grumpy when they're hungry. *Amanda Salis, University of Sydney*

Happy news! Masturbation actually has health benefits. *Spring Chenoa Cooper and Anthony Santella, University of Sydney*

Psychopaths versus sociopaths: what is the difference? *Xanthe Mallett, University of New England*

Health Check: why does hair change colour and turn grey? *Rodney Sinclair, University of Melbourne*

Health Check: why mosquitoes seem to bite some people more. *Cameron Webb, University of Sydney*

Orthorexia nervosa: when righteous eating becomes an obsession. *Rebecca Charlotte Reynolds, UNSW Australia*

In pursuit of happiness: why some pain helps us feel pleasure. *Brock Bastian, UNSW Australia*

Monday's medical myth: you can't mix antibiotics with alcohol. *Michael Vagg, Deakin University*

Health Check: why do some people feel the cold more than others? *Shane Maloney and Duncan Mitchell, University of Western Australia and Andrea Fuller, University of the Witwatersrand*

Health Check: here's what you need to know about protein supplements. *Tim Crowe, Deakin University*



## HIGHLIGHTS: POLITICS + SOCIETY

Australian politics had a frenetic start to the year as elections and leadership spills happened in quick succession.

In January, two months after a first-term Coalition government had fallen in Victoria, the Liberal-National government in Queensland suffered the same fate. By early February, the alarm in Coalition ranks led to a federal partyroom revolt, but Tony Abbott survived his "near-death experience". Only NSW Premier Mike Baird retained the confidence of voters, as his government was comfortably returned in March.

After the budget bombshells of 2014, we closely scrutinised the Abbott government's second effort in May.

We ran a series on Shaping 2015, exploring the policy challenges ahead. We also looked back for the Anzac centenary series and forward with the New Politics series on how politics is changing. The Democracy Futures series continues in partnership with the Sydney Democracy Network, stimulating fresh thinking about challenges facing democracies today. When Malcolm Turnbull ousted Abbott as prime minister in September, we responded to his promise of government for the 21st century with a series considering what this should look like across key policy areas.

We ran an extended series on capital punishment before and after the executions of two Australians in Indonesia. The State of Imprisonment series looked at imprisonment policies around the nation, followed by Beyond Prison on alternatives to prison.

Domestic violence, child sexual abuse and the plight of asylum seekers in offshore detention continued to demand our attention. So did terrorism, in particular after the Paris attacks, and national security.

*John Watson, section editor*  
*Michael Courts, deputy section editor*

### Most-read articles

No, you're not entitled to your opinion. *Patrick Stokes, Deakin University*

Women suffer the myths of the hymen and the virginity test. *Sherria Ayuandini, Washington University in St Louis*

Why the world is wary of China's 'great wall of sand' in the sea. *Clive Schofield, University of Wollongong*

Michelle Payne defies horse racing's long history as a sport of blokes. *Wayne Peake, Western Sydney University*

Arab parties emerge as electoral force in the Jewish state. *Danny Ben-Moshe, Deakin University*

Bali Nine duo executed: the view from Indonesia. *Yohanes Sulaiman, Indonesian Defense University, Tobias Basuki, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Andina Dwifatma and Asmin Fransiska, Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia*

The revealing facts on bikie laws and crime in Queensland. *Terry Goldsworthy, Bond University*

Can Newman still be Queensland premier if he loses his seat? *Anne Twomey, University of Sydney*

Disproportionate coverage of Paris attacks is not just the media's fault. *Folker Hanusch, Queensland University of Technology*

Islam, blasphemy and free speech: a surprisingly modern conflict. *Ali Mamouri, Australian Catholic University*





## HIGHLIGHTS: SCIENCE + TECHNOLOGY

Following the announcement of nine science and research priorities by the Chief Scientist, Ian Chubb, we ran a series with contributions from Professor Chubb and senior scientists, analysing the challenges and opportunities represented by each priority.

We hosted a live blog of the New Horizons flyby of Pluto, analysing the results as they were released by NASA. We also ran a series in collaboration with our colleagues in the UK, US and Africa celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Hubble Space Telescope, including a gallery of images hand picked by astronomers and astrophysicists.

We covered the announcement by Tesla of its Powerwall system, explaining the technology and analysing how it will impact the energy market. We closely followed developments in metadata retention and cybersecurity.

Another global collaboration was around the centenary of Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity in November, with articles sourced from scientists across the world to mark this auspicious occasion.

A major theme of 2015 was artificial intelligence and automation. We ran an article by the lead author of an open letter calling for lethal autonomous weapons to be banned, and posted several articles from AI experts and philosophers debating the merits of military robots. We also focused on the impact automation is expected to make on job markets.

*Tim Dean, senior section editor*  
*Michael Lund, section editor*

### Most-read articles

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

Four easy tips to make your batteries last longer. *Valentin Muenzel, University of Melbourne*

It's often the puzzles that baffle that go viral. *Jonathan Borwein, University of Newcastle*

Inskip beach collapse: just don't call it a 'sinkhole'. *Stephen Fityus, University of Newcastle*

The 'other' red meat on the 'real' palaeodiet. *Darren Curnoe, UNSW Australia*

Seven myths about scientists debunked. *Marguerite Evans-Galea and Jeffrey Craig, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute*

European invasion: DNA reveals the origins of modern Europeans. *Alan Cooper and Wolfgang Haak, University of Adelaide*

The verdict is in: feel-good exercise hormone irisin is real. *Eliza Berlage at The Conversation*

Brain-to-brain interfaces: the science of telepathy. *Kristyn Bates, University of Western Australia*

The smell of rain: how CSIRO invented a new word. *Howard Poynton, CSIRO*

## HIGHLIGHTS: **FACTCHECK**

This year we continued our popular FactChecks, where academics test statements by politicians and influential public figures against the evidence to see how true they are.

FactChecks provide opportunity to correct spin, increase accountability, and for independent research to be used as the basis for public discussion. FactChecks are blind-reviewed for added credibility.

Among the highlights was University of Melbourne expert Dylan McConnell's FactCheck on broadcaster Alan Jones and the price of wind power, which attracted nearly 50,000 reads and was profiled (favourably) on Media Watch. Simon Crouch from the University of Melbourne drew over 70,000 readers with his FactCheck on same sex marriage and whether having a mum and dad is the best thing for a child. Mary Anne Kenny from Murdoch University's four FactChecks on asylum seekers drew nearly 50,000 readers and offered readers a neutral explanation of a politically sensitive topic. Griffith University economist Fabrizio Carmignani's FactCheck on debt, deficit and government spending offered a fresh and clear explanation of a well-aired issue that separated fact from political rhetoric.

This year we launched a formal partnership with ABC TV's Q&A program, where our academics FactCheck statements by panellists on the show. The exposure and on-air mentions from host Tony Jones that readers can request FactChecks by our experts has resulted in enormous social media spikes and a boost to the numbers of readers seeing important work by Australian researchers.

Our academic fact-checkers covered all the big stories of the year: proposed arts funding changes, GST, inequality, climate change, Medicare funding, Indigenous affairs, human rights, tax reform, the ice epidemic, chronic disease and many more.

*Sunanda Creagh, FactCheck editor*

### **Most-read FactChecks**

Does coal-fired power cost \$79/kWh and wind power \$1502/kWh? *Dylan McConnell, University of Melbourne, reviewed by Alan Pears, RMIT University*

Q&A: was Katy Faust correct on same-sex family studies and kids' rights? *Simon Crouch, University of Melbourne, reviewed by Jennifer Power, La Trobe University*

Does Australia take more refugees per capita through the UNHCR than any other country? *Mary Anne Kenny, reviewed by Sara Davies, Queensland University of Technology*

Might there have been people in Australia prior to Aboriginal people? *Iain Davidson, University of New England, reviewed by Michael Westaway, Griffith University*

Is 50% of all income tax in Australia paid by 10% of the working population? *Ben Phillips, University of Canberra, reviewed by Miranda Stewart, Australian National University*

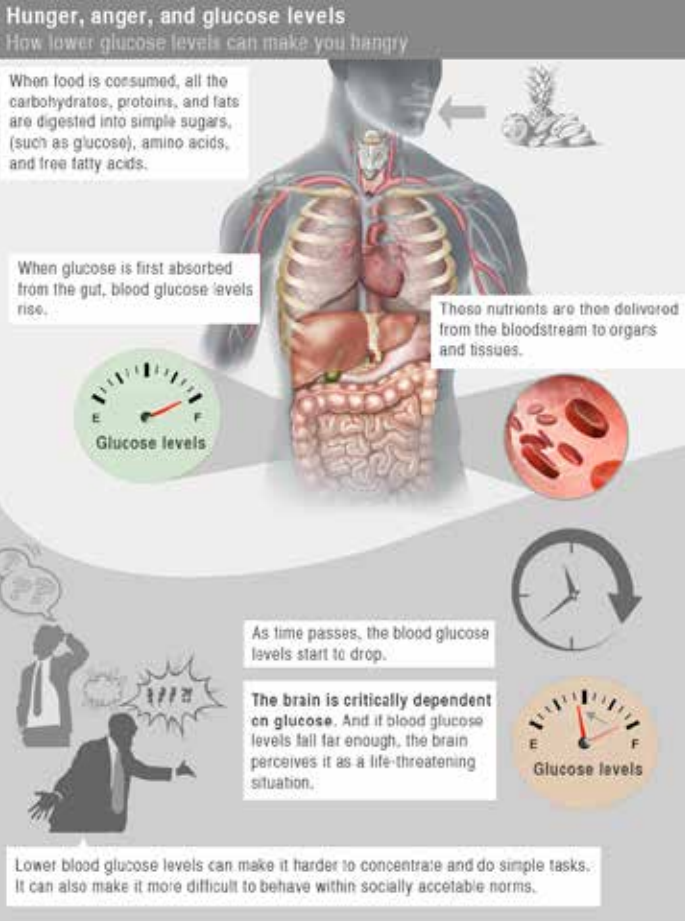
Is ice more dangerous and addictive than any other illegal drug? *Nicole Lee, Flinders University, reviewed by Michael Farrell, UNSW Australia*

Q&A: Will India no longer buy Australian coal? *Craig Froome, The University of Queensland, reviewed by Roger Dargaville, University of Melbourne*

Q&A: is Australia the most unequal it has been in 75 years? *Genevieve Knight, Flinders University, reviewed by Nicholas Biddle, Australian National University*







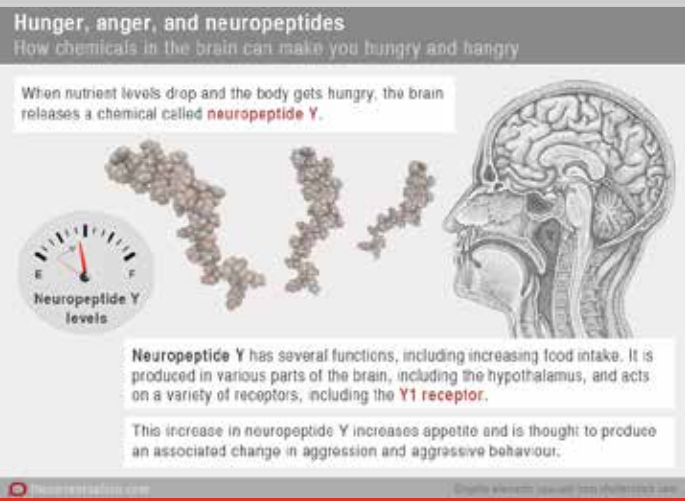
## HIGHLIGHTS: MULTIMEDIA

Our Speaking With podcast series is now available on iTunes, which helped secure new audience. Speaking With highlights include interviews with author and activist Naomi Klein, moral philosopher Peter Singer and astrophysicist Meg Urry, all of which had strong listenership. Also popular was Michelle Grattan's politics podcasts series, including interviews with Malcolm Turnbull, Anthony Albanese, Sam Dastyari, Josh Frydenberg and other MPs and senior public figures.

On graphics, the federal budget infographics were very popular again this year. The three infographics were among the most viewed of our budget coverage, attracting hundreds of thousands of readers on budget night. Other graphic highlights include an analysis of Australia's housing affordability problem, a snapshot of private health insurance coverage, the results of the first emission reduction fund auction and an explainer of the new UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We also created an interactive map that tracks country pledges to reduce greenhouse gas emissions ahead of the Paris climate negotiations.

*Emil Jeyaratnam, Multimedia editor*



## HIGHLIGHTS: COMMUNITY

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

This year we made great strides improving the quality of comments and building a productive community.

We have created new editorial products to allow our audience to participate and directly engage with our experts. These include our popular Author Q+As, which we now run three times a week. We ran our 100th this year. We also launched “your questions answered”, where readers pose questions and we commission authors to answer. Examples include IVF and artificial intelligence.

Our Community Council – a volunteer group of moderators made up of readers and authors – has continued to help moderate comments and model best-practice behaviour.

We launched a Removing Content policy, providing transparency around when and why we’ll remove content, including when requested by readers, that does not violate our community standards. This was developed in conjunction with our editorial board, community and strategic partners.

We added two small but useful features to comments: formatting and previewing. These have led to a better commenting experience for our community and an easier reading experience.

And our off-topic section (OTC, or as affectionately named by the community “The Oaty Sea”) has been running for over 60 weeks now, receiving upwards of 200 comments each week. In addition to being an enlightening place community members can discuss anything they’d like, it’s also become a place for them to arrange offline discussions and meet ups.

*Cory Zanoni, Community Manager*



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Global technology partner



## Founding



## Strategic

## Project partners

## Media partner



## Members





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