
From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 7 March 2022 12:09 PM
To: Committee, Communications (REPS)
Cc: Committee, Communications (REPS); [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Proof Transcript - 1 March 2022 [SEC=OFFICIAL]
Attachments: Communications_and_the_Arts_Committee_Proof_Transcript_2022_03_01_CBR_edited2.docx

Hi Danny

Please find attached the revised Proof Transcript of our appearance at the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts Inquiry into Regional Newspapers. We are satisfied that with these amendments the Hansard is a true and accurate representation of our appearance. We also took two questions on notice from Mr Gorman, and our responses are below.

Question 1: *You recommend two lots of research, two lots of evaluation. We heard evidence yesterday from WA newspapers that they're looking at decisions over the next 12 to 24 months about whether or not they shut down or change their regional news model. My question for you is: do we actually need more research or do we have all of the evidence base we need to know what actions the government should have taken in the past and should be taking in the future? I will ask you to take that on notice.*

Answer: We appreciate your point that there is a sense of urgency around the timeframes in which news businesses are making decisions about their futures, but I don't agree that this means enough research has been done. There is a need for ongoing research and evaluation of the implementation of the News Media and Digital Platforms Bargaining Code. We note the announcement of the much needed evaluation of the Code's first 12 months by Treasury. But independent research is needed to monitor the longer-term impact of the voluntary content agreements with regional and rural newspapers on the signatory companies, those who have not become signatories, and the wider regional and rural news environment. The research needs to be approached from three perspectives: digital platforms, news businesses, and government. Any research agenda must have the impacts of media policy on the public at its heart. For maximum impact, this research requires collaboration with government, digital platforms, news businesses, and academia. Additionally, a range of government programs have been implemented in the past, but the efficacy of them have not been established. Without proper evaluation, it is difficult to know which financial interventions from government were beneficial and worth repeating or augmenting. It is also true that the Australian news media, regional news in particular, have been facing financial difficulty for more than a decade. Rather than ad hoc one-off funding programs, there is a need for ongoing stable sources of income to help buoy the industry and stop further contraction. Given the limits of the eligibility criteria and short time frames of the deals, government cannot rely on this financial support being provided by Google and Facebook via the NMBC alone.

Question 2: I'd be interested in you sharing with us the specific regional impact on the university fee hikes from the coalition government, whether those fee increases have already led to a change in who is studying journalism or anything you've seen in what it's doing there, what impacts this is going to have over time on newsroom diversity and what impacts it has in terms of the decisions that people make. The University of Canberra academics may also wish to answer this.

Answer: The Federal Government's 2020 Job Ready Graduates Package resulted in a 113% fee increase to students wanting to study in the humanities, including journalism. This attack on the humanities was strongly opposed across the higher education sector. While passionate young people want to study journalism and communication, it is the longer term, chilling effect on the study of humanities and social sciences, where students develop essential analytical, critical thinking and applied research and writing training, that is likely to have a long-term impact on journalism. This policy must be reversed to bring the study of HASS disciplines back into line with science and education degrees.