

## **Dr Tom Barratt and Dr Caleb Goods' Response to Questions on Notice**

### **Senate Select Committee on Job Security**

**26 July 2021, 13:00 EST Hearing**

Question 1: Senator Small asked us to consider the recently published Industry Code of Practice in relation to historical risks with regard to Occupational Safety and Health in the domain of food delivery riders.

Our Response: We thank the Committee Secretariat staff for provision of the document. We have three major comments in response to the document.

Firstly, we wish to note that not every food-delivery platform is represented here, and at least one platform that had one of its contractors die in a road accident in late 2020 is not represented.

Secondly, the commitments here do not always square with the experience of work. Due to the information asymmetries between platform and courier, couriers do not know what metrics are being rewarded, there are elements of job design which inherently or indirectly may still create pressure to engage in risk taking behaviour, this is particular concerning in a context where workers are already at risk due to the nature of the work (riding/driving in urban environments). Further, there are incentives to work faster and longer due to the 'piece rate' remuneration schedule (with the exception of one of the signatory companies' employment trial), meaning that riders retain economic incentives to expose themselves to workplace risks.

Thirdly, while we see this Industry Code of Practice as a step in the right direction, the code has little oversight and therefore accountability. In short, if signatures do not meet their voluntary obligations under the code there is no punitive impact or requirement to improve their performance.

Question 2: Senator Small asked us to expand upon Dr Goods' comment that *"Most [on-demand food-delivery couriers we interviewed] ha[d] been doing it for a really short period of time, and most saw themselves as only doing it for a short period of time—that is, they often didn't even consider it to be real work; they wouldn't refer to it as real work."* Senator Small further asked that we relate this to our proposals for reform, and how they might apply to various gig economy context.

Our Response: Dr Goods comment stemmed from analysis of our interview data, and referred to our paper entitled "'Is your gig any good?' Analysing job quality in the Australian platform-based food-delivery sector' to which we referred in our submission. This paper examined the platform-based food-delivery sector in terms of the quality of the jobs being performed by couriers, using a psychological, sociological and economic lens. One element of our argument in the paper was that there are at times tensions or conflicts between elements of the job. For example, riding in poor weather conditions increases couriers' risk of harm and decreases their enjoyment, yet their economic satisfaction increased as under such conditions they experienced that there were relatively more gigs available.

The workers who drew the conclusion that this was not a 'real job', was explained as being a coping mechanism with the low economic quality of the work. The argument was, from the workers, I cannot consider this to be a real job because it is so poorly paid or unenjoyable, so it must be understood as a hobby or exercise for it to make sense.

While we do not have data for other gig economy contexts, we would argue that the work needs to be of sufficient economic worth to the worker, in terms of effort required and remuneration, in order to be considered real work. This would suggest that there are indeed thresholds below which

jobs can be considered subjectively, by workers, as hobbies as opposed to business. There is provision for example for distinction between a hobby and a business under taxation law. As such it depends on the quality of each job across the gig economy.

This also relates to our recommendations regarding app-based work.

With regards to the safety recommendations, it is important to ensure the safety of these workers whether they consider it to be a real job or otherwise, and so the recommendations do not need to be reframed here.

Our recommendation for a mechanism for transparency around earnings is only further underscored by this distinction between 'real job' or otherwise.

The recommendation for greater workplace protections, reinforced by our survey of Australian citizens, is again underscored by the vulnerability and lack of workplace protections for these workers, whose working conditions fall well short of equivalent casual work.