AOASG
Australasian Open Access Strategy Group

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Follow up submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Training Inquiry into the efficiency, effectiveness and coherency of Australian Government funding for research.

Australasian Open Access Strategy Group
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Executive summary

The scholarly publishing system for research is largely closed, complex, costly, and non-competitive. It is also intertwined with incentive structures for individual researchers and league tables for institutions. Publishers' financial interests, a lack of incentives for open scholarship and an excessively high value placed on publishing in specific journals have contributed to both inertia and active resistance to change to more open, efficient and equitable ways of dissemination of research.

Over the past 10-15 years there have been many global innovations in publishing policies and practices which are driving a transition to more open access to research[1234] and the beginnings of better incentive structures. However, the transition is far from complete and in the absence of an overarching national strategy, Australian efforts remain largely fragmented. Given the many global models that are in progress, there is an opportunity now to draw on the best of these global models and to develop a coherent, visionary national approach. Following the Australasian Open Access Strategy Group's AOASG initial submission[5] to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Training into the efficiency, effectiveness and coherency of Australian Government funding for research, we are pleased to make a follow up submission.

We propose the setting up of a national coordinating body funded for five years to lead and coordinate the development of a strategic approach to Australia's open scholarship environment.

Context

Open scholarship is no longer a theoretical concept—it is now rapidly becoming integrated into academic activity globally. It underpins research integrity[6] by favouring reproducibility and it maximises the impact of research. Open access to research publications is just one part of open scholarship and needs to be coordinated with related initiatives such as the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable)[7] principles and good management of research data[8]. Increasing

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[1] Budapest Open Access Initiative http://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/
[2] Harvard Open Access https://osc.hul.harvard.edu/
[3] Open Access in Horizon 2020 https://www.openaire.eu/h2020openaccess/
[4] OA2020 Initiative https://oa2020.org/
[5] AOASG Submission to Inquiry into the efficiency, effectiveness and coherency of Australian Government funding for research. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/FundingResearch/Submissions
[6] Centre for Open Science https://cos.io/
[7] Fair Open Access Statement https://www.fair-access.net.au/
[8] Research Data Management http://www.ands.org.au/working-with-data/data-management

access to research outcomes also provides more opportunities for public engagement with research and supports a stronger evidence base for the development of policy.

The current model, dominated by for-profit publishers, is expensive[9], and does not serve the best interests of Australian universities, the economy, or the wider public. We are in a transition phase where it is necessary to pay for both access to research findings and to publish research outcomes—in addition to the very substantial public investment in funding most of the research activity itself. In 2016 $262M[10] was spent on subscriptions by Australian universities (the national cost, including subscriptions paid by health, government and industry sectors, is actually much higher, but there is no national data source for this). An analysis of subscription costs paid by New Zealand universities shows that costs to access articles per academic vary by more than 35% between universities. On a per academic basis these costs are more expensive than costs in Europe. [11] Article processing charges for payments to publish in fully open or partially open journals (paid by academics or individual schools within universities) has been estimated at around $20M[12] p.a., although this is likely to be a substantial underestimate since many article processing charges paid by authors are not tracked. A European analysis has suggested that there are substantial cost savings to be made if there were to be national-scale transitions to open publishing, though it would be necessary to confirm the applicability of this modelling in Australia.[13]

There are related challenges that have led to change inertia, the most important of which is the incentive structure that exists in academia of rewards for academics for publishing in specific journals, and rewards to universities in the way of league tables based on these publications. Central in the present system is the contentious use of "Journal Impact Factors", which are used as a proxy for the quality of scholarship of individual articles, which have a distorting effect on the overall system and now serve a commercial rather than a scholarly purpose. Though alternatives are emerging, their take-up has been patchy.[14][15]

There are many diverse approaches being undertaken internationally to open scholarship. Increasingly, however, countries are developing national implementation plans[16][17] in order to move forward strategically. In Australia there are many organisations, including advocacy groups,

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[9] Is the staggeringly profitable business of scientific publishing bad for science?
https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/jun/27/profitable-business-scientific-publishing-bad-for-science
[10] Data from the Council of Australian University Librarians
[11] Universities spend millions on accessing results of publicly funded research https://theconversation.com/universities-spend-millions-on-accessing-results-of-publicly-funded-research-88392
[12] Data from survey of Australian University Librarians, 2017
[13] Schimmer, R.; Geschuhn, K.K.; Vogler, A. (2015): 'Disrupting the subscription journals' business model for the necessary large-scale transformation to open access' (http://dx.doi.org/10.17617/1.3);
[14] Declaration on Research assessment https://sfdora.org/
[15] Nichols, D. M., & Twidale, M. B. (2017). Metrics for openness. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 68 (4) 1048–1060. doi:10.1002/asi.23741
[16] French National Plan for Open Science https://libereurope.eu/blog/2018/07/05/frenchopenscienceplan/
[17] Swedish Plan for Open Access http://www.kb.se/dokument/open%20access/OpenAccess_National_Library_Sweden_2017_2019.pdf

universities and peak bodies, who have initiatives in one or more areas of open scholarship. Although there are discussions among these groups there is no one body with oversight that is responsible for coordination, nor is there any dedicated funding for a strategic approach. Despite the Productivity Commission's recommendation for a National Open Access policy and the Government's acceptance of that recommendation[18], Australia lacks a coherent approach to open scholarship.

In order to develop a system that maximises the dissemination and impact of Australia's research and which aligns with relevant international initiatives there needs to be a centrally coordinated and realistically resourced national approach.

Proposal

We recommend setting up a national coordinating body, funded for five years, charged with leading and coordinating the development of a strategic approach to Australia's open scholarship environment including fully engaging with relevant international initiatives. Such a body could either be situated within an existing government agency or be constituted separately. We estimate that dedicated $3M funding[19] over five years would be required.

A program of work for the first year would be to:

- Fully map the Australian publishing landscape (including existing open initiatives) and assess requirements for access to, and efficient dissemination, of research publications;
- Review and assess open scholarship globally with the aim of recommending best practices for adoption in Australia;
- Commission a cost-benefit analysis of changing to a more open publishing environment;
- Convene a group to develop a national action plan and oversee a consultation process;

and

- Produce specific recommendations on a national approach to open scholarship in Australia, including policy, actions and the funding required.

Following the development of a national plan – and in coordination with existing relevant national organisations such as Universities Australia, the ARC, NHMRC, Australian Research Data Commons, F.A.I.R. Steering Group, Council of Australian University Librarians, Australasian Open Access Strategy Group, and Creative Commons Australia – this national body would develop and oversee a program of work in order to implement the plan, which would include recommendations for the allocation of appropriate resources.

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[18]Government Response to Productivity Commission's intellectual property report https://www.communications.gov.au/departmental-news/government-response-productivity-commissions-intellectual-property-report

[19] We estimate costs p.a. to be: $220k for Director (salary and associated costs, including travel); $150k for one FTE professional staff member; $80k for one FTE administrative position; and $150k (office space and associated administrative costs).

Possible streams within such a program of work would be:

- Development and implementation of processes for standardised collection of data on all costs of publishing – both for access to content and services to publish;
- Support for programs of infrastructure required to support open scholarship, such as the full application of consistent metadata (as exemplified by ORCID identifiers for authors[20]);
- Development of a strategic approach for the support of a diverse, national non-commercial open publishing sector, including existing academic and university presses, and university and other academic repositories;
- Provision of data for negotiations with publishers, both subscription and open access;
- Development and coordination of a program of training and support for open scholarship within academic institutions;
- Review of the current system of incentives for academics and institutions and alignment with open scholarship practices;
- Development of a program of public engagement on the benefits of public access to the outcomes of research, especially publicly funded research.

We would be happy to provide further information on this submission.

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[20] https://aaf.edu.au/orcid/