



The House Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Training inquiry into the efficiency, effectiveness and coherency of Australian Government funding for research.

Comments from the Australasian Open Access Strategy Group

June 22, 2018

Background

The Australasian Open Access Strategy Group ([AOASG](http://www.aoasg.org.au)) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into this inquiry. The AOASG is [supported](#) by ten universities in Australia and eight in New Zealand; Creative Commons Australia and New Zealand are [affiliate](#) members. AOASG works to increase open access to academic research outputs and to promote innovation in all areas of scholarly communications. We collaborate with relevant national and international organisations that are working in this area, in particular the ARC and the NHMRC in relation to their open access policies. We also promote public discussion of the need for access to research outputs and we are building capacity in this area by supporting communities of practice in Australia and New Zealand and by providing advice to universities and other relevant organisations.

Comments on the inquiry

We provide comments on one aspect of efficiency within the current funding system: the funding for publication of research.

Currently the predominant model for publication of research is through subscription journals, a multi-billion dollar commercial industry, mostly of non-Australian for-profit publishers. A fundamental inefficiency in the system is that every university that wants to provide access to specific journals (*even for publications from its own researchers*) has to subscribe to those journals, either through individually negotiated prices or through consortial agreements negotiated on behalf of the sector by [Council of Australian University Librarians](#) (CAUL). Spending on subscription journals in Australia was \$262.5m in 2016. This sum is equivalent to more than 30% of the entire budget that the [ARC spent on research funding in 2016](#) - \$744.5m. The effect of this model is that, for any given journal, publishers will be paid by every institution in Australia (or indeed globally) that needs to have access. If an institution does not subscribe to a given journal, one-off fees to access articles (which are not counted in the in the subscription spend quoted above) are usually in the range of \$20-50 per article for individual (and often temporary) access.

The emerging model of open access (OA) publishing turns this model on its head by ensuring that one-off costs of publication come at the time of publication, either via support for open access journals (also known as “gold” open access) or by providing access through curated repositories at researchers’ institutions (also known as “green” open access). It is a more cost effective model than subscription

publishing and ensures that that everyone in Australian academic institutions can have free access in perpetuity to published articles.

An added immense benefit of open access extends far beyond universities; under open access models anyone can access Australian published research. Specific groups in Australia that benefit and who rarely have funds to pay for academic journal subscriptions include small and medium sized businesses; school students; medical practitioners who are not associated with universities and interested members of the public. The benefits extend far beyond Australia. By making Australian research open it can have impact internationally.

In Australia there are examples of both publisher-led and repository-led OA. A comprehensive list of Australian OA repositories and OA journals is maintained at the [AOASG site](#). Australian university libraries were each funded more than ten years ago to implement and improve their open access research publications repositories and then again later to implement open data repository infrastructure but there is no ongoing coordinated funding.

Recommendations

There are a number of key issues that need to be addressed in a coordinated fashion if a transition to open access is to be effective and maximally efficient and we therefore make two recommendations to this inquiry.

1. **Develop a coherent national approach for open scholarship in Australia.**

Though there are groups that are actively promoting open scholarship in Australia – such as the AOASG, CAUL, (who also coordinated the development in 2016 of the [FAIR Statement](#) on access to Australia's research), the [Learned Academies](#) as well as the [ARC](#) and [NHMRC](#) who have open access policies – there is no one organisation with the responsibility to drive change across the sector. Hence, there is no agreed national approach. The result is inadequate and ageing key infrastructure - for example, for interoperability between research output repositories - and a lack of consistent coordination on specific initiatives. There is also no "Research Australia" national collection of research outputs as there is for Europe ([OpenAIRE](#)), the U.S. ([SHARE](#)) and South America ([La Referencia](#)) and as a result there is limited opportunity for national branding, access and impact for Australian research outputs.

There are successful global initiatives in this area that could act as models. For example, Sweden has a Government Directive on Open Access, and a [National Body for Coordinating Open Access](#) which is chaired by the Vice-chancellor of Stockholm University. The Netherlands has a [National Plan for Open Science](#) supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and championed by the Secretary of State, Sander Dekker. Notably, both of these countries have centrally funded bodies with a specific remit to develop and implement a coherent national strategy.

2. **Coordinate with the newly formed Australian Research Data Commons, [ARDC](#).**

In response to the [consultation on the National Research Infrastructure Roadmap](#) last year we noted: “We welcome the recommendations for the formation of The Australian Data Cloud [as was proposed then], but given the increasing need for integration of all the outputs of research we urge that it forms part of a wider strategy that includes other research outputs and associated policies required for implementation.” We remain convinced that an open scholarship policy that coordinated initiatives on data with other outputs would be fruitful and cost effective.

We would be very willing to follow up and provide further detail on these comments.