CAUL
COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIANS

Inquiry into Funding Australia's Research Response

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Overview

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) is the peak leadership organisation for university libraries in Australia. CAUL members are the University Librarians or equivalent of the 39 institutions that have representation on Universities Australia. University libraries are diverse institutions, which intersect core university business.

CAUL's vision is that society is transformed through the power of research, teaching and learning. University libraries are essential knowledge and information infrastructures that enable student achievement and research excellence. CAUL makes a significant contribution to higher education strategy, policy and outcomes through a commitment to a shared purpose:

> **To transform how people experience knowledge – how it can be discovered, used and shared.**

University libraries and library organisations broadly play a leading role in enabling fair, affordable and open access to knowledge. They are also instrumental in building society's capacity for digital dexterity – fluency in the use of digital technology, skills and essential literacies.

CAUL is grateful for this opportunity to provide a response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training's Inquiry into Funding Australia's Research.

Noting the Inquiry's Terms of Reference[1] this response shall address the 'opportunities to maximise the impact of funding by ensuring optimal simplicity and efficiency for researchers and research institutions while prioritising delivery of national priorities and public benefit'.

Specifically open access to research outputs which is a major issue affecting the cost and efficiency of research in Australia. This inquiry presents an opportunity to address two of the most pressing challenges, the need for national coordination and greater cost transparency.

To address these challenges CAUL recommends to the inquiry that:

1. The Australian Government should adopt a single policy statement for open access to research outputs, as a first step ARC and NHMRC policies should be harmonised and managed by a single entity.

2. The Australian Government should prioritise its commitment to addressing the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Intellectual Property Arrangements recommendation 16.1.

3. The Australian Government should require the collection and reporting of open access costs associated with publically funded research, paying specific attention to the payment of Article Processing Charges (APCs). This could start with research funded by the ARC and NHMRC.

4. The ARC and NHMRC should be tasked with monitoring compliance with open access policies, and explore incentives for compliance in line with other international funding agencies.

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[1]https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/FundingResearch/Terms_of_Reference

Background

Open access to research outputs is a major issue affecting the cost and efficiency of research in Australia.

The publication of research outputs is an important mechanism for disseminating the results of publically funded research serving as a source of ideas and may form the foundation for further research and discoveries. Currently much of this research is only available outside of academia for a fee paid to publishers. University libraries across Australia endeavour to make research openly available, but there are a number of barriers in place which prevent the timely and effective communication of research. Ensuring that these publications are openly accessible helps maximise the public benefit of research, including for industry and the general community.

We note that in August 2017, the Australian Government released a response[2] to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Intellectual Property Arrangements[3] in which it supported recommendation 16.1 that states:

> 16.1 The Australian, and State and Territory governments should implement an open access policy for publicly funded research. The policy should provide free and open access arrangements for all publications funded by governments, directly or through university funding, within 12 months of publication. The policy should minimise exemptions.

We estimate that in 2017 approximately 60% of all research outputs held in university repositories were openly accessible[4]. Internationally it has been estimated that only 45% of global research outputs were openly accessible in 2015[5], so Australia is certainly making progress – but has a long way to go before all outputs are open access.

Currently there are a number of challenges facing open access to research outputs in Australia, this inquiry presents an opportunity to address two of the most pressing challenges, the need for national coordination through government policy and greater transparency around costs.

Policy consistency

Australia lacks consistency when it comes to open access, there is little constancy or coordination of policy between the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments or government agencies such as the ARC and NHMRC.

Globally a move towards open access is making the copyright environment increasingly complex as funding agencies and publishers adopt various open access principles. It has become so complex that a wide variety of services[6] and tools are now available to help institutions manage open access compliance issues. This complexity is increasing the cost and reducing the efficiency of research.

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[2] https://www.communications.gov.au/departmental-news/government-response-productivity-commissions-intellectual-property-report

[3] http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/intellectual-property#report

[4] https://statistics.caul.edu.au/

[5] https://doi.org/10.7287/peerj.preprints.3119v1

[6] http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/index.php

Currently the ARC[7] and NHMRC[8] have clear but distinct open access policies that are constant with the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Intellectual Property Arrangement recommendation 16.1 but similar transparent policies have not been put in place elsewhere.

The Australian Government's response to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Intellectual Property Arrangement committed to:

1. requiring all Publically Funded Research Agencies to put in place transparent policies that are consistent with this approach, and

2. Calling on state and territory governments to implement transparent open access policies that are consistent with this policy for publications arising out of the research they fund.

But so far little action has been taken. There is also no systematic monitoring by the ARC or NHMRC of compliance with open access policies, or penalties for non-compliance in Australia. Internationally some funding bodies, such as Wellcome Trust[9], have sanctions for non-compliance (e.g. withholding a percentage of grant funding).

To help coordinate a consistent approach to open access policy a national F.A.I.R. (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) Policy Statement[10] for Australia has been established with the aim of providing a pathway to improving the discoverability and impact of Australian research outputs and to improve community and industry access to research.

Adoption of the statement is currently being overseen by a steering group[11] which includes representatives from universities, industry and government. The F.A.I.R. policy statement is referenced in ARC and NHMRC open access policy and provides an essential foundation for any open access policy statement.

Transparent costs

To put the cost of access to research outputs into perspective Australian university libraries spent approximately $281.76 million on access to journal subscriptions alone in 2017 (Figure 1) a cost which continues to increase. In addition to this, researchers may also be asked to pay Article Processing Charges (APCs) by publishers to make their work openly available, these fees can range from $1500 to $8000 per article. APCs are paid for in various ways and are a legitimate use of research funding under ARC and NHMRC grant funding rules. How and where such fees apply varies, in some instances payment is not required as an article can be made openly available in a University institutional repository and still meet the ARC and NHMRC requirements for open access.

But fees are not systematically tracked, and the real cost of open access is unknown. CAUL will be reviewing approaches to collect APCs information in the second half of 2018 to develop a process for collecting this information at Australian universities.

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[7] http://www.arc.gov.au/arc-open-access-policy

[8] https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants-funding/policy/nhmrc-open-access-policy

[9] https://wellcome.ac.uk/funding/managing-grant/complying-our-open-access-policy

[10] https://www.fair-access.net.au

[11] https://www.fair-access.net.au/about/steering-group

Expanding the collection and reporting of these costs to all Australian Government funded research would help provide a clearer picture of the real cost, and put Australia in a better position to negotiate fair prices with publishers for access to research outputs.
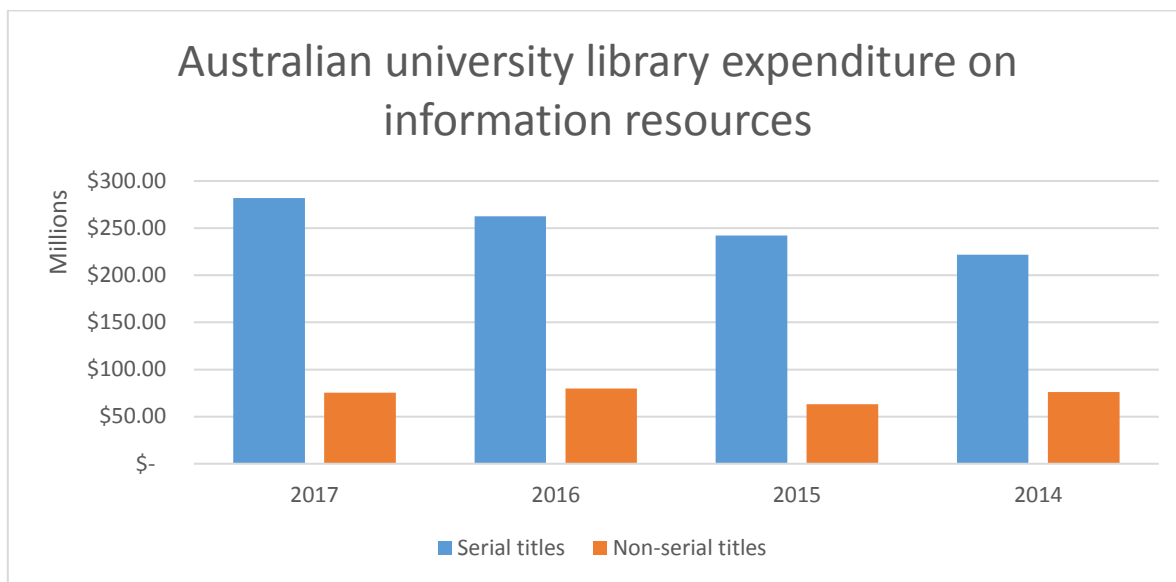

Figure 1: The cost of serial titles (journal subscriptions) and non-serial titles (Books, ebooks etc.) paid by Australian university libraries in 2014 - 2017.