



CAUL Response to the Universities Accord Discussion Paper

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The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) is the peak collegiate body for the leaders of university libraries in Australia and New Zealand. CAUL facilitates connection and collaboration, and optimises its collective knowledge, expertise, and resources, to achieve strategic outcomes at scale in priority areas for the university library sector. CAUL is the trusted voice of the university library sector in the region.

CAUL welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Australian Universities Accord Discussion Paper and supports the aims of the review to address the seven priority areas. Academic libraries have individually and collectively provided significant leadership to leverage opportunities inherent in technological disruption. The next stage of wider transformation around scholarly publishing and communication requires national leadership to mark the course for Australia as a nation and to secure the future of its intellectual capital to meet our needs.

While university libraries are a key contributor in all aspects of university business and play a vital role in teaching, learning and research excellence, CAUL's submission focuses on a select number of priority areas where we have specific recommendations for consideration by the review panel.

The critical role of the university library in learning, teaching, and research

Australian university libraries play a critical role in teaching, learning and research and therefore in the university sector's ability to address the major national challenges and opportunities that face us as a country. University libraries are well positioned to support the sector in meeting Australia's knowledge and skills needs into the future. University libraries, and CAUL as their peak leadership body, have a proven track record of collaboration and innovation in areas including open science infrastructure and support, information literacy and digital dexterity, support for diverse students, and open education practice. University library spaces represent the heart of universities; they are critical places of learning, connection, interaction and belonging. In an increasingly digital world, physical library spaces remain at the centre of the campus, providing a range of services and amenities that support students to have a positive experience at university, from student kitchens to 24/7 study zones. University libraries are a powerful and fit for purpose



infrastructure that is positioned to support research and teaching, promote inclusion and diversity, and build digital literacy skills.

Recommendation: CAUL suggests that the role of the university library is a key consideration in the Universities Accord review. Consultation and engagement should draw on the expertise of CAUL and its Members to ensure the critical role of the university library in a robust, contemporary higher education sector is adequately attended to throughout the review.

Reducing the costs of study through open educational resources

Relates to:

- Q29 What changes in provider practices and offerings are necessary to ensure all potential students can succeed in their chosen area of study?
- Q30 How can governments, institutions and employers assist students, widen opportunities and remove barriers to higher education?
- Q31 How can the costs of participation, including living expenses, be most effectively alleviated?

Australian students are under increasing financial pressure. A 2019 study, focused on students receiving Centrelink benefits, found that approximately 80% of participants have struggled with the cost of essential study items and course fees, and about 35% have had to withdraw from studies due to financial stress. Almost 90% of participants indicated they had to skip at least one meal a week and 30% said they skipped six or more meals per week. For many students, purchasing expensive textbooks is not an option.

Widespread adoption of open textbooks, and open educational resources (OERs) more generally, has the potential to level the playing field for students by ensuring that no student has to decide between buying groceries and buying a textbook. The findings from Jessica Thiel's (Queensland University of Technology) 2022 thesis suggest that

There exists an opportunity for innovation and progress through the broader adoption of open publishing in higher education. The broader adoption has the potential to positively influence the way publishing in education considers systemic issues such as equity, diversity and inclusion. This research investigates the way open publishing in higher education operates and offers one potential solution to the prevalent social dilemma of access to and use of educational materials. ([Open Publishing and the Value of Access](#))

While they may be free for students to access, open textbooks are not free to create. Aside from the investment of an academic's time in writing an open textbook, there are production costs including platform fees, the cost of a professional editor, library staff time in providing copyright and licensing advice, and overheads associated with running a peer review process. Additionally, writing texts represents additional workload for academics.



Commercial textbooks are often prohibitively expensive for students, and also represent a significant impost on library budgets largely supported by public funding. Restrictive licensing models that limit concurrent users and high licence fees make it difficult – and in many cases impossible – for university libraries to provide adequate access to electronic versions of textbooks, further impacting on access and equity. When the ongoing costs of providing adequate access to commercial textbooks are considered, investment in developing open textbooks in key discipline areas would be a compelling value proposition, particularly in the context of a national OER strategy with defined benchmark targets, a governance framework and funding.

CAUL has been working to support university libraries to build institutional capability and capacity in OER publishing through several strategic program projects. Most significantly, the CAUL OER Collective Pilot Project has made substantial progress on capacity development by establishing a service spanning Australia and New Zealand that provides universities with OER project scaffolding (from development of a [publishing workflow](#) to regular training for library staff and authors), a shared [Pressbooks platform](#) on which to publish open textbooks, and a grant scheme that awards authors grants to fund aspects of the publishing process. The service is funded by a CAUL Member levy. The Collective has proven the value in cross-institutional collaboration on open textbook publishing and shown that incentivising open textbook development through grants has a real impact on author willingness to invest time in developing OERs. Over the two grant rounds run to date, the Collective has received more than 70 expressions of interest from author teams.

In North America, government funding has had a significant impact on development of open textbooks. In the United States, the Open Textbook Pilot, a federally funded initiative, has seen \$47 million invested in the program since 2018. Projects funded by the grants are estimated to result in \$250 million in student savings (see [Open Textbook Pilot Grant Program](#)). These government funded initiatives have helped drive progress on open textbook development at scale. In Australia, some institutions run small, local grant schemes to partially fund development of a small number of textbooks per year, and CAUL's OER Collective has funded 27 books in its two years of operation. CAUL's experience demonstrates that there is significant academic interest in developing open textbooks, but without the kind of government funding that has been made available elsewhere in the world, scaling up OER production is challenging.

CAUL's OER Collective Pilot has proven the concept of a national capacity development and granting initiative. In her doctoral research, Jessica Thiel recommends that “universities should aim to internally redirect an amount of funding currently used for other activities (such as the money set aside for equity schemes, teaching grants, and others), into an Australia wide open publishing project” and that “the Australian Government [should] also provide financial support to match the contributions (or otherwise) made to the open publishing project.” ([Open Publishing and the Value of Access](#))



The OER Collective Pilot is an exemplar of Dr Thiel's proposal, with 35 universities across Australia and New Zealand contributing a nominal participation levy to fund the pilot. CAUL advocates a national approach, with dedicated government funding allocated to establish an initiative like the OER Collective, but on a broad scale underpinned by government support. The initiative should include shared infrastructure with a unified open textbook catalogue for easy discovery, a stream of capacity development work designed to support institutions to skill up in all aspects of open textbook publishing, and a grant scheme that makes more substantial grants available to author teams. To achieve maximum return on investment, grants should prioritise common areas of need across universities and be awarded to collaborative, cross-institutional author teams.

Currently most open textbook publishing in Australia occurs through university libraries. This, coupled with CAUL's demonstrated expertise in developing and administering collaborative national projects related to OERs, positions CAUL as the logical choice to coordinate and support the implementation of government funded initiatives in open textbook publishing.

Recommendation: A national open textbook strategy is needed to drive university-level investment in open educational resources to enable students to succeed in their chosen area of study, remove financial barriers to higher education, and deliver greater ROI for textbook funding nationally.

Recommendation: Dedicated government funding should be provided to support open textbook publishing at a national scale, through establishing an open textbook initiative, coordinated by CAUL, that incorporates:

- shared infrastructure with a unified open textbook catalogue for easy discovery
- a stream of capability development work designed to support institutions to skill up in all aspects of open textbook publishing
- a grant scheme to fund development of textbooks.

Solving big challenges through open science

Relates to:

- Q23 How should an Accord help Australia increase collaboration between industry, government and universities to solve big challenges?
- Q24 What reforms will enable Australian research institutions to achieve excellence, scale and impact in particular fields?

Widespread adoption of open science practice is one of the most significant unrealised opportunities for addressing the major challenges that face Australia, and for supporting increased collaboration and knowledge sharing between industry, government, and universities. The UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science, adopted in 2021, defines open science as



an inclusive construct that combines various movements and practices aiming to make multilingual scientific knowledge openly available, accessible and reusable for everyone, to increase scientific collaborations and sharing of information for the benefits of science and society, and to open the processes of scientific knowledge creation, evaluation and communication to societal actors beyond the traditional scientific community. It comprises all scientific disciplines and aspects of scholarly practices, including basic and applied sciences, natural and social sciences and the humanities, and it builds on the following key pillars: open scientific knowledge, open science infrastructures, science communication, open engagement of societal actors and open dialogue with other knowledge systems.

Open science has many benefits, including: increased accessibility of research to citizens, government and industry; improved discoverability and visibility of research; increased transparency; improved reproducibility and reliability; speedier scientific enquiry; improved productivity; increased research efficiency through reduction in duplication of effort and the ability to reuse scientific outputs; increased innovation. Critically, open science aids “knowledge flows between universities and research institutes to end-users of research such as government, society and industry” ([Australian Academy of Science](#)).

Discourse around open science has been increasing in Australia and New Zealand. In 2019, the Australian House of Representatives inquiry into Australian Government Funding Arrangements for non-NHMRC Research [recommended that](#) “the Australian Government develop a more strategic approach to Australia’s open scholarship environment”. In 2020, the CAUL and Open Access Australasia (previously AOASG) coordinated [national and international consultations](#) with a broad range of senior stakeholders on a potential policy approach to open research in Australia. More recently, in 2021, Australia’s Chief Scientist, Dr Cathy Foley, began a body of work focused on developing a [national approach to open access](#). In 2022, the NHMRC released a revised open access policy requiring full and immediate open access to research outputs from all grants funded from that point onwards, and for all existing grants from 2024.

For many years, CAUL has been working to advance open access to research outputs through both its strategic programs and the CAUL Content Procurement Service. Since 2021, CAUL has negotiated 21 Read & Publish agreements, providing the opportunity for researchers at participating institutions to publish open access without incurring article processing charges. In 2023, Australian (and New Zealand) researchers have the potential to publish over 25,000 articles open access under these agreements. Over the same period, Australia (and New Zealand) rose from 31st in the world rankings for proportion of research outputs eligible for open access to 6th position in February 2023. From 2023, 79.3% of publications now have the potential to be open access, of which 64.3% comes from transformative agreements, the majority of which are negotiated by CAUL. ([ESAC Market Watch](#))



While progress is being made, particularly related to open access to research outputs, the full potential of open science in Australia has not been realised. The adoption of the UNESCO Open Science Recommendation in 2021 provided impetus for countries to develop their own nationally coordinated approaches to open science, and indeed, this has been done in many places globally through adoption of national open science policies, strategies, and action plans. Australia is lagging behind in this space.

Further, there is an urgent need for significant government investment in open research infrastructure to support open science practice. Other regions (for example, Europe with the European Open Science Cloud) are investing heavily in this space. While a plan for investing in National Research Infrastructure (NRI) exists in the form of the [NRI Roadmap](#), we suggest more needs to be done to better interconnect the various elements of the research ecosystem through infrastructure. The UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science articulates the type of infrastructure required to support open scientific practice and highlights the need for standards and persistent unique identifiers to promote interoperability and allow and connect scientific objects across the research system. This requires strong investment in repository infrastructure for publications, data, and code, along with creation and adoption of interoperable standards. Development of best practices that allow connections to be made between research objects across different types of repositories and other research systems, and across the research life cycle will be critical for maximising funding and investment outcomes and to foster a culture of open science.

We suggest there is a need for coordinated national investment in infrastructure to support open scholarly communications. Examples of opportunities include development of national infrastructure for open journal and monograph publishing. At present, Australian universities independently manage open presses for monograph publication and open journals, with individual institutions managing their own infrastructure. In particular, there is a need for investment in infrastructure to support scholarly communication initiatives that are specific to the Australian context, including those that publish Indigenous research, such as open access journals and books. These are currently largely supported by universities and other not for profit organisations and are vulnerable to changes in funding allocation by the parent organisation. There is a need for dedicated funding for local infrastructure, in addition to collaborative infrastructure and services to support university activity in these spaces.

Recommendation: A national open science strategy is required to provide a framework for a coordinated approach to advancing open science in Australia, across universities, government, and industry. This strategy must prioritise coordinated approaches to all open science practices across the entire research lifecycle, both within and beyond universities. Such a strategy should articulate goals and targets for universities to drive widespread adoption of open science practices.

Recommendation: There is a need for a funding framework for universities that prioritise development of critical integrated open science infrastructure at individual universities and collaboratively, at a national scale.

Recommendation: There is an urgent need for cultural change related to assessment of researcher and university performance. Such a change must be driven by an assessment framework for the sector. Current approaches to ranking universities and the research groups within them, and to performance assessment of individual academics, do not incentivise open science practice. Current bibliometric practices for assessing research performance reinforce traditional scholarly communication behaviours and do not drive academic adoption of open science practices.

Lifelong learning

Relates to:

- Q15 What changes are needed to grow a culture of lifelong learning in Australia?
- Q16 What practical barriers are inhibiting lifelong learning, and how can they be fixed?

University libraries, and the broader Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museum (GLAM) sector, play a critical role in equipping students to become lifelong learners. University libraries support students to develop information and digital literacy skills that allow them to find, critically analyse and apply information, and to select, critically evaluate and use technology, during their studies and beyond.

To grow a culture of lifelong learning in Australia, attention to lifelong and learning across the lifespan must be embedded in all degree programs and through co-curricular activities. The focus must go beyond continuing professional learning post-graduation to focus on other aspects of lifelong learning. To ensure this occurs, our understanding of lifelong learning needs to become more nuanced, and this understanding needs to be reflected in graduate attributes.

Widespread adoption of open science practices and investment in open educational resource development will support growth of a culture of lifelong learning in Australia by providing graduates – and the general public – with access to research and learning resources after graduation.

Recommendation: There is a need for a national statement of priorities that clearly articulates the health, economic and social benefits that flow from a broad culture of lifelong learning, with a clear articulation of what this means through all stages of life. This statement should reflect the critical role of the GLAM sector in enabling lifelong learning. University libraries, via CAUL, are well positioned to collaborate with National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA), the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) and others to enact such a statement.

About the Council of Australian University Librarians

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CAUL members are the University Librarians or equivalent of the 39 institutions that have representation on Universities Australia and the eight members of the Council of New Zealand University Librarians (CONZUL).

CAUL Council Members are located throughout Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. CAUL acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, and the contributions made by Indigenous people to both CAUL and CAUL Member institutions in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. We pay our respect to Elders, past, present, and emerging, and all Indigenous people. CAUL is committed to partnering with Indigenous people for positive outcomes.

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