

Investing in the Australian scholarly communication ecosystem

Proposal for NRI consultation from Open Access Australasia, Dec 21, 2021

Contact: Dr Ginny Barbour, Director, Open Access Australasia director@oaaaustralasia.org

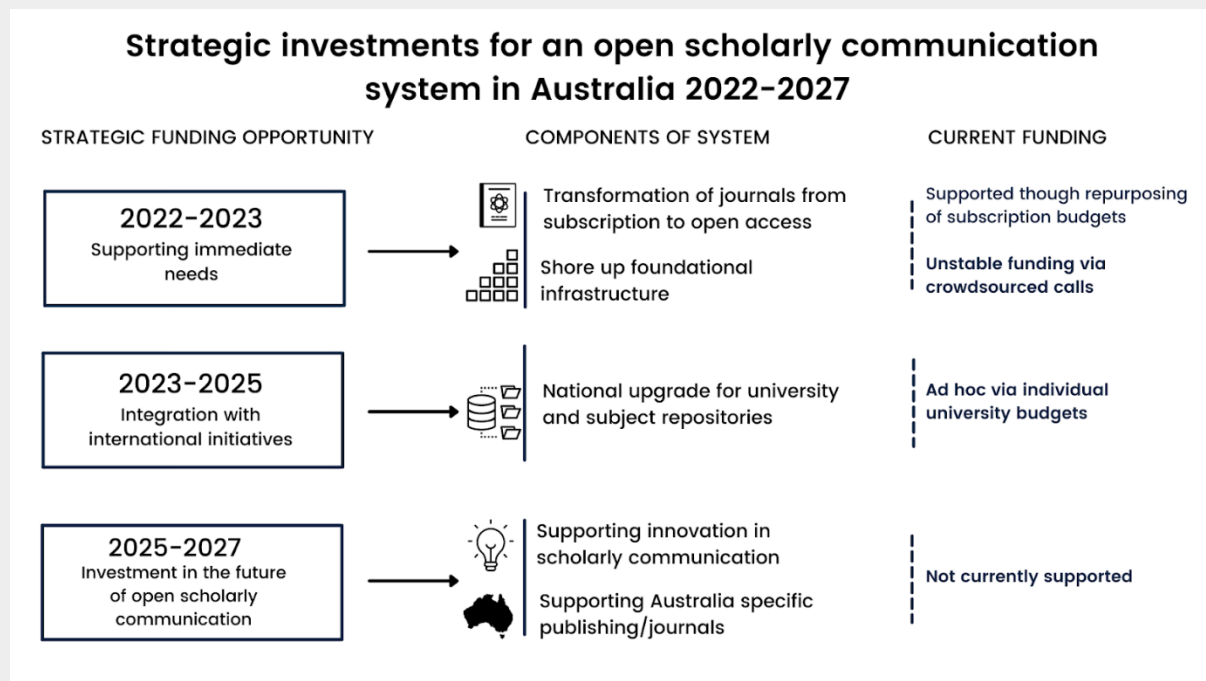
Background

We are at a pivotal time in the evolution of the scholarly communication system - the system whereby research findings are published and disseminated. COVID-19 has demonstrated more than ever before that research needs to be made openly available through a diverse and responsive system. A modern, open scholarly communication infrastructure is needed to support the needs of the many groups - researchers, funders, policymakers and the Australian public - that need to publish, synthesize and access research.

Over the past 20 years we have seen research publishing begin to transform from a largely closed system of subscription publishing, where research articles were only accessible through subscriptions, and the underlying data were, with a few notable exceptions (such as genomic and physics data), not accessible at all, to a system that is becoming more open, but not in a strategically aligned way. A 21st century open scholarly communication system needs to be diverse, agile, equitable and supportive of the specific needs of the Australian environment to make Australian research globally available and to maximise its impact. In order for the system to function well it requires stable funding.

The situation now

Most recently, through the work of the [Council of Australian University Librarians](#) (CAUL), the major emphasis in increasing openness in Australia has been on supporting a transition of subscription journal publishers to open access. This work is also in alignment with the work of the Chief Scientist on open access. There remains a need for matching investment in the other key components of the scholarly publishing ecosystem, such as support for wholly open access publishers, the long-term development and modernisation of institutional repositories that curate and preserve Australian universities' research, and academic-led experimentation in open research options.



How could the NRI strategically invest?

Overarching investment in the infrastructure that supports scholarly communication in Australia would solidify Australia's commitment to open access and the boost the impact of its research. This investment would align with the themes of the National Research Infrastructure consultation of resilience, transformation, and optimisation.

We propose the following strands of investment:

1. Investment in the upgrading of the **university repositories** through a nationally coordinated program. The last national investment into Australian repositories was in 2007. An upgrade would allow Australia's university repositories to fully support and participate in relevant international initiatives such as the Confederation of Open Access Repositories ([COAR](#)) modernising repositories program, and integrate in global networks such as the European [OpenAIRE initiative](#). It would ensure that university repositories are able to fully align with other related infrastructure projects - for example in data, such as those managed by [ARDC](#).

***Elaboration:** Australian universities could be supported to work with their repository vendors to ensure compliance with open access initiatives - including updates of relevant software - to support a national research repository network across Australia that would aggregate outputs from across the sector. This would ensure research outputs comply with international standards such as [FAIR principles](#) and integrate Australian content with global initiatives.*

2. Develop a pool of funding to **support innovation** in scholarly communication. Funding could be modelled on [Research England's](#) emerging priorities fund. This approach would encourage experimentation, especially of academic-led initiatives.

***Elaboration:** Many innovative journal publishing models have been developed by academics to support specific publishing needs. One such journal is [SciPost](#), which as an emerging journal network that is not part of a large publisher, relies on voluntary funding from universities.*

3. Provide specific support for **initiatives that are unique to Australia** such as journals that publish Indigenous and other regionally relevant research. [A recent report](#) from cOAlition S has highlighted the importance of such journals.

***Elaboration:** Small, niche journals often do not have the resources to implement and manage the software and processes that can support journals sustainably. One solution could be provision and implementation of the Public Knowledge Project ([PKP](#)) [Open Journals System](#) ([OJS](#)) either directly with PKP or with another service provider such as [Atmire](#) or [Ubiquity Press](#) for the publishing and hosting of uniquely Australian peer-reviewed academic journals.*

4. Provide a mechanism for long term stable funding of the **supporting infrastructure of scholarly communication**. As elsewhere, research communication in Australia depends on a number of services that provide quality control for publishing. Examples include [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) (DOAJ), [Directory of Open Access Books](#) (DOAB). Currently none of these services receive any Australian government support and depend for their funding on crowdsourcing initiatives such as the [Global Sustainability Coalition for Open Sciences \(SCOSS\)](#).

***Elaboration:** The Australian Government could financially support well used open infrastructure by pledging via SCOSS to help [financially sustain open science services](#) such as [arXiv](#) (a preprint server for the physical sciences), PKP, [Open Citations](#), and DOAB/OAPEN. The French Government supports infrastructure via SCOSS.*

About Open Access Australasia

[Open Access Australasia](#) is a membership organisation of 20 Australian university libraries, all 8 New Zealand university libraries through the Council of New Zealand University Librarians, Creative Commons Australia, Tohatoha Aotearoa Commons, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), Australian Digital Alliance (ADA) and Wikimedia Australia. Its mission is to attain open access to research in Australia and New Zealand through advocacy, collaboration, awareness, and capacity building across the Australian and New Zealand research sectors.