

ARE YOU FREE? AUSTRALIA WELL PLACED TO REACT TO UK OPEN
ACCESS INITIATIVES.
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ANU academics Peter Drahos and John Braithwaite in their 2002 publication *INFORMATION FEUDALISM* (Earthscan) emphasised the importance of intellectual property rights in the modern knowledge economy. They took their title from the medieval period when feudalism became a system of government and the majority of the working class had to live with the arbitrariness of ultimate power. They saw the need to establish public “intellectual commons” to protect against knowledge monopolization imposed by multinational publishers especially in science.

University and institutional researchers create a large part of the world’s knowledge base. Researchers tend to give away their intellectual output free of charge to large multinational publishers who generate hundreds of millions of dollars of profits annually. In many instances academics provide peer review and editorial work free of charge as part of a misguided belief in academic collegiality. Depending on one’s viewpoint of this “Faustian bargain” between academics and publishers, the scholarly publishing environment has been in crisis for a number of years, although the term “crisis” has been with us for so long as to almost nullify the term! The maxim has been “Plus ça change, plus c’est la meme chose”.

But it is no longer the same thing! Vive la revolution? Less than a week after a US Congressional Committee called for open access to research funded by National Institutes of Health, Britain's prestigious House Of Commons Science and Technology Committee has issued a major Report: *SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS: FREE FOR ALL?* Available at www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/s&thome.htm

The Report strongly advocates scholarly publications to be made available free of charge to all, including the interested public and the developing world. Research articles will be either posted on institutional Web sites or published in Open Access peer reviewed journals. The Report makes extensive recommendations but particularly important is the recommendation that all UK higher education bodies should establish institutional repositories through which university research can be accessed free of charge.

The influential SPARC group based in Washington has argued that institutional repositories - digital libraries capturing and preserving the intellectual output of a university community - provide a compelling response to two strategic issues facing universities and research organisations. They serve as tangible indicators of a university's quality and provide a critical component in the evolving global access to scholarly information. Material in repositories gains wide currency through global search engines such as Google and OAIster.

The UK Report also recommends that Research Councils and other Government funding agencies mandate their funded researchers to deposit a copy of all of their articles in this way. In addition, to encourage Open Access journals, the Report recommended that the UK Research Councils each establish a fund to which funded researchers can apply for publication costs.

In Australia Open Access developments have been ahead of the international pack. In 2001 the ANU Library established the first university Eprint repository and this has been followed by a number of Australian universities; several major DEST initiatives are bearing fruit and the Group of Eight Vice Chancellors earlier this year released a "Statement on Open Access to Scholarly Information". This stated, *inter alia*, that information, if it is to achieve maximum benefit for society, must be readily available to a global audience.

DEST granted 12 million dollars in October 2003 for a number of national initiatives, including repository developments, through consortia led by ANU (Australian Partnership for Sustainable Repositories) and Monash (Australian Research Repositories Online to the World -ARROW). The National Library of Australia is involved in both projects particularly in the areas of digital preservation and metadata standards.

The National Scholarly Communications Forum (NSCF), a body sponsored by the four Australian learned Academies, has provided important leadership in this area. Presentations from its recent seminar CHANGING RESEARCH PRACTICES are available at: <http://www.humanities.org.au/NSCF/current.htm>. The published outcomes clearly foreshadowed the UK Report.

The NSCF recommends Australian research accessibility to be widened through open access research initiatives within institutions, particularly through the encouragement of institutional repositories, including the adoption of university-wide policies to collect and archive institutional research output, for example in connection with RAE exercises and the adoption of further open access

mechanisms, such as open access journals and not-for-profit electronic publishing.

The NSCF called on public research funding bodies, utilising taxpayer monies, to ensure that research is made publicly available, for example by the inclusion of relevant publication costs in research grants. Tim Besley, the CEO of the Australian Research Council, was a speaker at the NSCF conference and hopefully the ARC will follow DEST's examples in Open Access publishing. Dr Evan Arthur, Acting Group Manager, DEST Innovation and Research Systems Group, indicated in his speech that he anticipated seeing an ARC grant recipient lodging a post print of his/her funded article in the relevant university's digital repository with links to research assessment profiles and publicly accessible data gateways.

Dr Arthur emphasised the Government's belief that it has a major policy interest in pursuing the agendas of making research quality more apparent, and research results more accessible in parallel. The practical implications of these NSCF recommendations are expected to be explored in the near future. It is clear that Australia is well placed to take its place in the new forms of the scholarly Open Society if the current momentum is maintained.

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