

Reimagining Open Access: A Diverse Approach from Australia

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Abstract:

The Open Access movement has come a long way since the Budapest Open Access Initiative principles were first released in the early 2000s. Examples of open practices began to appear worldwide and, against this background, the Australian government demonstrated a strong commitment to open research by providing support to academic institutions in a number of ways, including funding for institutional repositories empowering universities to store and share research outputs.

More recently, Australia has seen a rapid adoption of transformative agreements, leading to 56 per cent of new journal articles being published as gold open access in 2023. However, while gold open access is rising, other open access pathways—such as green open access through institutional repositories—are in decline. This shift highlights a critical issue: transformative agreements alone cannot provide a viable path to making all Australian research freely available.

At James Cook University (JCU), the ResearchOnline@JCU institutional repository houses metadata records of close to 60,000 research outputs going back to 2007. Some 44,000 of these records are journal articles with more than 28,000—or 63 per cent—of these outputs being locked behind a paywall.

This presentation will highlight a suite of open access initiatives carried out at JCU, a research-intensive university in regional northern Australia, to bridge this gap; and share practical strategies that could be adopted by other institutions worldwide. In addition to the more conventional approaches such as negotiated publisher agreements, open access repositories, and diamond open access journals, we have successfully implemented several additional initiatives including the appointment of open access champions and green open access drives. We propose that many of these initiatives can be applied to a wide variety of institutions to advance the goal of championing a diverse open access publishing landscape

Keywords: Open Access, Australia, James Cook University Library, Institutional Repository, Biodiversity

Introduction

More than twenty years since the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) helped formalise the open access movement, the international community continues to face seemingly intractable barriers to sharing the full range of scientific knowledge with the world. As elsewhere, Australian universities are still grappling with challenges posed by publishers, funding bodies, and in some cases, even researchers themselves. Despite the rapid uptake of transformational agreements – known as Read and Publish Agreements in Australia – open access rates at Australian universities have stalled at around 64 per cent since 2023, according to data provided by the Curtin Open Knowledge Initiative (2025). Gold open access rates continue to increase due to Read and Publish Agreements, but open access through other pathways, including institutional repositories, has decreased in recent years. It has become clear that negotiated agreements alone cannot provide a viable path to making all Australian research freely available. The infrastructure exists, but new ways need to be found to incentivise researchers to make their research outputs open access. A bibliodiverse approach to open access is being developed at institutions across the world.

Originally applied to advocate for a publishing landscape composed of large and small publishers from diverse cultural backgrounds and contexts, the term “bibliodiversity” has more recently been used by scholarly publishing professionals to express the importance of diverse open access pathways working in parallel to maximise free and fair access to research. Gold open access – the publishing model where authors pay to make research publications freely available to the public – cannot, in isolation, serve as a path to universal open access. The open access movement must take advantage of all the tools at its disposal, including volunteer-run, not-for-profit diamond-open-access journals and the sharing of manuscripts through author self-

archiving policies – commonly known as green open access. As the 2020 call to action published by the Confederation of Open Access Repositories suggests:

Biodiversity requires a variety of open infrastructures and services around the globe – a network of community-driven infrastructures - localized and serving the needs of different communities. In addition, we have learned from the past that simply focusing on the technical and economic dimensions of publishing is not sufficient and we have to pay equal if not more attention to the socio-political dimensions of infrastructure design and building (Shearer et al, 2020).

Nevertheless, the question of what biodiversity might look like for an individual institution remains, to a certain extent, unresolved. The pages that follow provide one example of what a diverse approach to open access might look like in a regional Australian university setting.

Considering three broad categories of approach – gold open access, green open access and diamond open access – this paper looks at a raft of initiatives that can be incorporated into a university context to overcome flattening open access rates in the Australian scholarly publishing landscape. These low-cost strategies include the appointment of open-access representatives within the academy; open access competitions to increase engagement; formalised relationships between the library and university journals; and the drafting of policies to enshrine and promote open access approaches to publishing. Highlighting seven open access initiatives currently being carried out at James Cook University the paper puts forward a suite of practical strategies that might be adopted by research institutions worldwide.

James Cook University: Open Access at a Regional Institution

James Cook University is a mid-sized research-intensive Australian university based in northern Queensland. In addition to its primary campus in Townsville, the university maintains campuses in Cairns in Australia and in Singapore. James Cook University Library takes responsibility for maximising free and fair access to the research publications being produced by the university. As at many other academic institutions across the country, approaches to open access at James Cook University have been developed as a network of interconnected strategies to make as many publications as possible more accessible within strict budgetary constraints.

As a proportion of research outputs, open access rates at James Cook University have risen markedly over the course of two decades. While the university was slower off the mark than some pioneers like the Queensland University of Technology and the Australian National University, James Cook University's open access rates have risen sharply in the last decade, from 46 per cent of publications being open access in 2014 – according to the data provided by the Curtin Open Knowledge Initiative Open Access Dashboard – to

75 per cent in 2023 (Curtin Open Knowledge Initiative, 2025). More recently, however, open access rates at James Cook University, like at many other Australian universities, have begun to slow down. In 2024, open access rates have remained fixed at 75 per cent. Nevertheless, the university is currently ranked fifth out of the 35 Australian universities included in the Leiden Open Ranking for proportion of publications that are open access in the 2019 to 2022 period (Centre for Science and Technology Studies, 2025).

Open Access Policy

As part of the university's efforts to support open access, James Cook University enacted an Open Access Policy in 2012. In 2022, this policy was expanded upon and replaced by a broader Open Scholarship Policy, which remains in practice today. Part of this policy requires researchers to deposit author accepted manuscripts to the institutional repository to facilitate open access:

The University requires that, where the Version of Record of a research publication is not freely and openly accessible, the Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) must be deposited to ResearchOnline@JCU immediately upon publication to facilitate "Green" Open Access. (James Cook University, 2022)

Policies such as this one operate primarily as aspirational targets rather than as absolute regulations. The reality is that, at James Cook University – like most other research institutions – obtaining copies of author accepted manuscripts from researchers remains an ongoing challenge. The library is currently working on further expansion of its Open Scholarship Policy to include a rights retention statement as part of a strategy to exert greater control over self-archiving rights (Hinchliffe, 2021). James Cook University's draft statement has been adapted from the one provided by the National Health and Medical Research Council that serves to mitigate publisher embargoes and make the university's research outputs freely available sooner (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2025).

Read and Publish Agreements

Read and Publish Agreements have become a major component of James Cook University's open-access publishing profile. These agreements are negotiated by the Council of Australasian University Librarians on behalf of member institutions and provide participating universities with open access publications in selected hybrid and gold open access journals (Council of Australasian University Librarians, 2025). They repurpose journal subscriptions to include access to content and author processing charges. All Australian universities have made good use of the Read and Publish Agreements as a pathway to gold open access publishing. The number of agreements available to Australian universities has increased in each year since 2022. In 2025, JCU

had signed on to agreements with 19 publishers, including Cambridge University Press, Taylor and Francis, and, most recently, Emerald. Mamtora et al have observed that “Some agreements are subject to article caps which apply to all participating institutions, while the journals included in the agreements often exclude major flagship journals. The Springer-Nature agreement does not include open access publishing in *Nature*, for example, while the Elsevier agreement does not include *The Lancet*” (in-press). There are early signs at James Cook University that these agreements have substantially increased the proportion of research outputs that are published through the gold open access pathway but as noted earlier in this paper, this has not led to an increase in the overall proportion of open access publications after 2023. The number of participating authors has increased with each subsequent year that the agreements have been in effect, from 123 in 2022 to 255 affiliated authors in 2024, publishing 331 articles open access using the agreements.

Institutional Repository

Like all Australian universities (Kennan and Kingsley, 2009; Mamtora et al, 2015), James Cook University maintains an online institutional repository, ResearchOnline@JCU, an instance of the EPrints open-source repository software (2025). This repository is used for a variety of purposes including reporting on publications, displaying research outputs on academic profiles and facilitating green open access. The rate of research outputs changed to green open access at James Cook University is consistent with other institutions in Australia with between 10 and 15 per cent of total publications converted over the course of the last decade. As at other institutions in Australia, however, rates of green open access have begun to decline slightly. In 2022, the green open access rate was 14 per cent of outputs as indicated by the “Other Platform Open” metric in the Curtin Open Knowledge Initiative Open Access Dashboard. In 2023, this metric reduced to 9 per cent of total research output, and it remained at 9 per cent in 2024 (Curtin Open Knowledge Initiative, 2025).

James Cook University’s repository workflow involves researchers self-depositing metadata records for all research outputs through the ResearchOnline@JCU interface at the time of publication. Full-text copies of all open-access publications are held in the repository and depositing publications is mandatory for university staff. A notification in the interface requests that researchers provide a copy of the author accepted manuscript if the version of record is not already published under a Creative Commons License to facilitate green open access. Despite this, the number of manuscripts obtained through this method have stalled in the last 24 months. Falling rates of self-archiving have led the James Cook University Library to develop some less conventional approaches to acquiring manuscripts which are discussed below, under “Green Open Access Competition.”

Diamond Open Access Journals

James Cook University maintains a suite of diamond-open-access journals hosted by Open Journal Systems and edited by researchers affiliated with the University (James Cook University, 2025). Three journals are currently active, while one has ceased publication and has been archived. Two of these journals are classified as Q1 according to Scopus CiteScore metric. *Queensland Archaeological Research* was established at the University of Queensland in 1984 and was the first to migrate to James Cook University's Open Journal Systems platform in 2016. *LiNQ* (Literature in North Queensland) was a long-running publication associated with James Cook University from 1969 until 2016. Its entire run was digitised and migrated to Open Journal Systems in 2016 as a means of archiving the journal for open access and future accessibility. *eTropic* was established at James Cook University in 2002 to "to provide a multidisciplinary venue for the dissemination of new research on the variety and interrelatedness of nature, culture, and society in tropical regions across the world" (James Cook University, 2025). Like *Queensland Archaeological Research*, *eTropic* is listed as a Q1 journal by CiteScore in 2025. The youngest journal published at James Cook University is the *Journal of Resilient Economies*, which was founded in 2021. The James Cook University Library is currently working with its editor to have the publication indexed in Scopus.

Open Access Awards

James Cook University Library introduced two open access awards in 2020. These are annual awards to engage the university community; to highlight the many benefits of open access research; as well as to recognise those researchers who were already publishing open access and had a good understanding of it. The HDR Open Access Advocate Award, which is jointly organised with the Graduate Research School, is awarded to the graduate student who best demonstrates an understanding of open access through the medium of a conference poster. The second award is the Early Career Researcher Open Access Champion Award, which is presented to the researcher who has made the greatest contribution to open access through their research publications within the most recent three years. More recently two open education awards have been introduced: the Open Education Champion Award and the Open eBook Excellence and Impact Award, which celebrate the work done in the area of open education and textbook affordability strategies at the university (James Cook University Library, 2024). The awards are presented during International Open Access Week at in-person events organised at each of the three campuses and provide a great opportunity to bring the community together to recognise the work that is being done at the university in the area of open access.

These awards can be readily adopted in a variety of institutions, and need not be expensive initiatives in order to be successful. Prizes can be as simple as printed certificates and public recognition of the winners' contributions to the

universities open-access performance. The judging panels in the awards listed above include academics, the previous year's winner and library staff. In the case of the ECR Awards, for example, the judging panel at James Cook University is composed of two Associate Deans for Research; the previous year's winner; the Manager, Scholarly Communications (Library); and the Repository and Research Outputs Coordinator.

Open Access Champions

Open Access Champions were recently chosen for each of the university's six academic colleges, as well as a champion for James Cook University's Singapore Campus (James Cook University Library, 2025). These champions were appointed as informal representatives for each of their academic areas for a variety of reasons: some were early career researchers who had won one of the university's annual open access week awards for demonstrating a clear, open access publication strategy; some were more senior scholars who had demonstrated good knowledge of open access publishing and its benefits; and others were research representatives for their colleges. The purpose of the role was to provide a direct line of communication between the library and each college and to provide persistent voices for open access advocacy throughout the university. Having individual points of contact with colleges presented additional opportunities for two-way communication and collaboration on open access projects, including the development of the green open access initiative.

The Open Access Champions were first informally appointed last year for the term of a year. This year they were consulted about continuing in the role. In some cases, the staff member initially chosen moved on and a replacement was selected. Two formal meetings were initially held to talk through roles and to discuss ways in which appointees could collaborate. It was important that the academics didn't see the workload as being too great and that they were aware of the potential benefits for the college. They have subsequently cemented connections between the various disciplines and the library and have broken through traditional siloing of research support and the academy. Furthermore, they have contributed to an increased presence of library personnel at key events within the colleges and have ensured representatives from the colleges engage with library initiatives. The Champions continue to play a vital role in the success of the Open Access Competitions as well as in educating researchers about Read and Publish Agreements and green open access. Strategies such as this one impose virtually no cost on institutions and can have substantial benefits in terms of staff participation in other initiatives.

Green Open Access Competition

In 2024, the Library initiated a green open access competition and named it, "Bring Out Your Dead!" The aim of the project was to increase the visibility and accessibility of the university's research outputs that were otherwise

locked behind a paywall. More than half of JCU's articles published prior to 2020, are not freely available to the public. The competition invited the academic and research community to submit author accepted manuscripts of their articles published from 2019 to 2024 in order to make them available open access, embargoes permitting. Limiting the submissions to this period allowed repository staff to process them in a timely fashion. Researchers could request a bibliography of research outputs that were eligible for self-archiving. By the end of 2024 the repository was able to convert an additional 169 articles and book chapters to open access as a direct result of the competition. Winners were announced for each of the seven entities, and individual events identified with college management to make the presentations and recognise the winners (James Cook University Library, 2024). The success of this initiative has led to organising the competition again for 2025.

As in the case of other open access competitions discussed in this paper, the Green Open Access competition is a low-cost and effective way to incentivise engagement with open access publishing pathways. While James Cook University created 3D-printed trophies for the winners, certificates are cheaply produced and still provide recognition to academic staff for their contribution. Winners are presented individually at college meetings to make the most of the competition and use it as an opportunity to promote using the institutional repository as a pathway to open access. A blog post is produced each year, outlining the terms of the competition and celebrating the winners. The post is also shared through social media posts to LinkedIn and X (Twitter). Self-archiving drives such as this one are a worthwhile addition at most institutions, and even if there is no institutional repository to facilitate open access, services such as arXiv (<https://arxiv.org/>) and the Social Sciences Research Network (<https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/DisplayAbstractSearch.cfm>) can be used to house author accepted manuscripts that are submitted by researchers.

Conclusion

Faced with the challenges of making research freely available at a time when budgets are constrained and commercial publishers wield tremendous power in the sphere of scholarly publishing, James Cook University Library has taken a diverse approach to open access. There is no single open access pathway which can achieve free and fair access to research in a dynamic and unpredictable mid-twenty-first-century higher education landscape. Open access requires multiple initiatives to be developed and deployed in concert, as outlined in this paper. Use of all available open access pathways is crucial to maximising the accessibility of research outputs.

This combination of approaches to open access publishing can be considered an example of the kind of bibliodiversity discussed in the early sections of this paper. Many of the strategies outlined above can be adapted—in some cases with minor modifications—by institutions of all types around the world and can

be deployed at little or even no additional expense. The concept of Open Access Champions employed at James Cook University is based on collegiality, is cost neutral and only requires the work of directly engaging with members of the academy to develop individual open access knowledge. Once on board, these academics can help teach their colleagues and improve understanding more widely. Open Access Competitions do not need to offer expensive prizes to attract interest from researchers. Competitive academics are looking for ways to stand out from the crowd, and a certificate demonstrating their proficiency at making their research freely available provides a useful indicator of research impact. While a rights retention policy might not be possible at every institution, providing a draft rights retention statement that can be adapted by researchers costs nothing. Transformative agreements like Australia's Read and Publish Agreements can be prohibitively expensive, but educating researchers about the possibility of requesting an APC waiver or establishing a working relationship with organisations like the Electronic Information for Libraries (2025) can provide affordable alternatives for researchers based in developing countries. Finally, a suite of open access practices need not always be highly formalised policies, and informal approaches through communication between library and academic staff can go a long way to establishing a range of open access practices at any institution. The future of open access lies in championing a diverse publishing landscape.

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