

# Asia Pacific Regional Workshop

## Equity in Open Access

Report prepared by Janet Catterall & Virginia Barbour,  
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## Introduction

As we move towards more open access to research, it is increasingly apparent that there is an emerging risk that as equity of access to read and use research improves, equity to publish declines and that many actors in the research publishing ecosystem may become more disenfranchised than before. The causes of this inequity are not just financial but also structural and cultural. Many recent initiatives such as Plan S, UNESCO, and work from the International Science Council (ISC) have highlighted inequity as a challenge.<sup>1-3</sup>

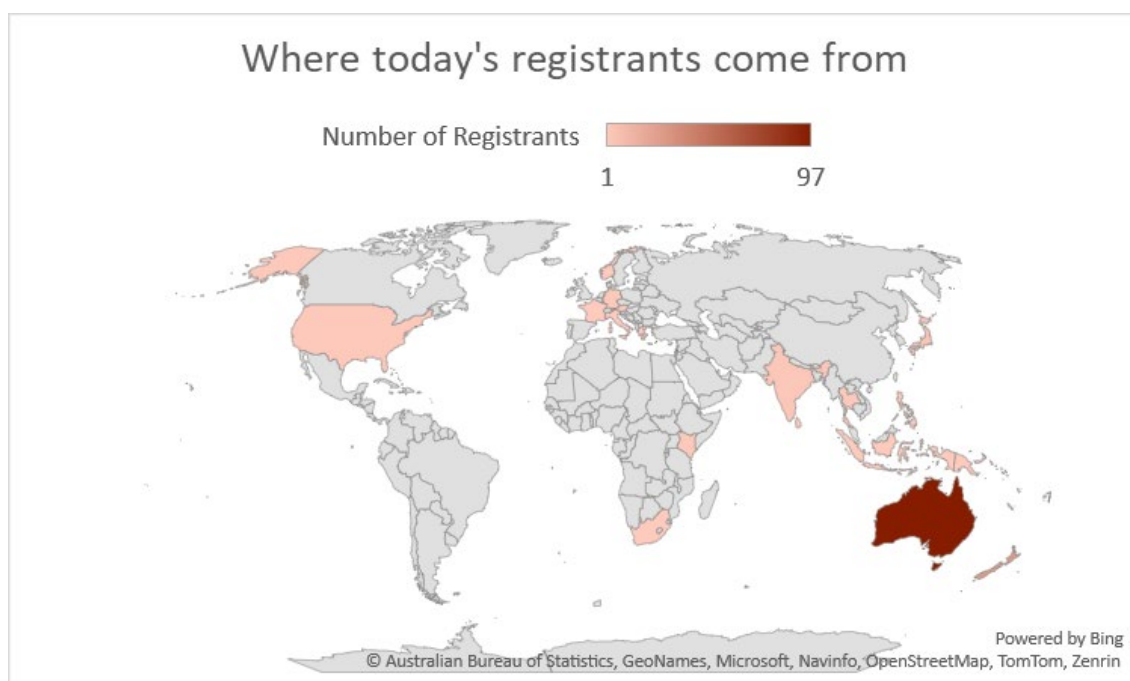
In 2022, UNESCO, the International Science Council (ISC), the Open Access 2020 Initiative (OA2020), cOAlition S, Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL), the Association of African Universities, and Science Europe combined to organise a series of workshops on equity in open access to be convened in three broad geographical locations: Europe and Africa; Asia Pacific; and the Americas.

Open Access Australasia (OAA) adopted “Equity in scholarly communications, to both access and publish research” as its key principle in 2020 and its work is framed around this central tenet.<sup>4</sup> OAA was therefore well placed to host the Asia Pacific workshop in collaboration with OA2020, the ISC, cOAlition S and additional partners, which was held June 1, 2023. This workshop brought together a wide range of participants from across Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the immediate region to discuss the challenges to equitable open access in 2023 in this region and to explore potential solutions, aiming to expand and build on insights gathered in the first workshop which focused on viewpoints from Africa and Europe.<sup>5</sup>

## Setting the Scene

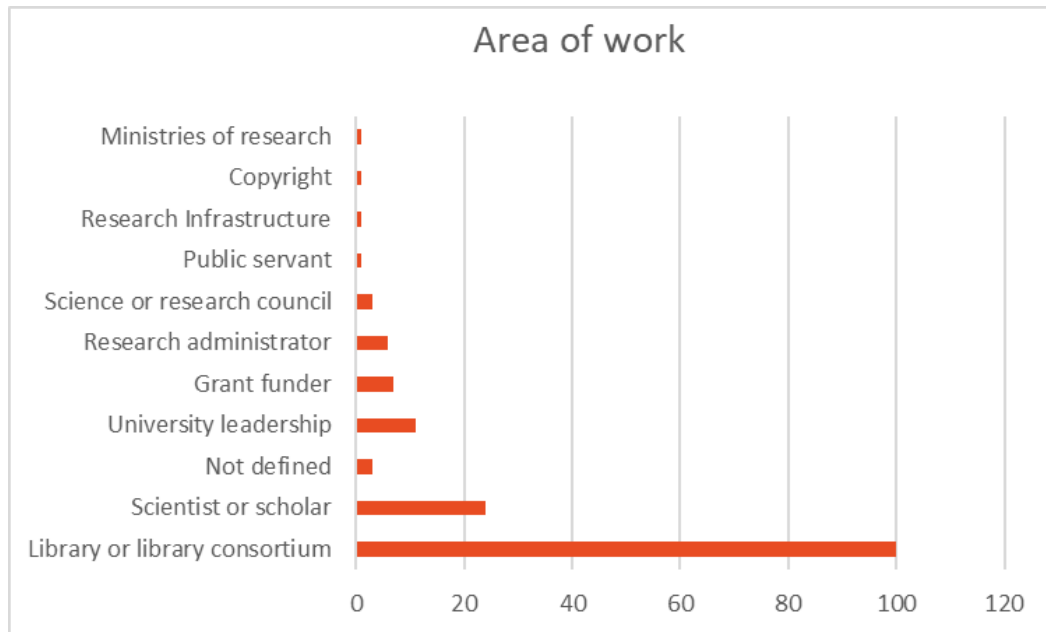
Registrations for the workshop came predominantly from Australia but participants also signed up from across the Asia Pacific region, as well as from North America, Europe and parts of Africa.

*Figure 1: Asia Pacific Regional Workshop Equity in Open Access: participation*



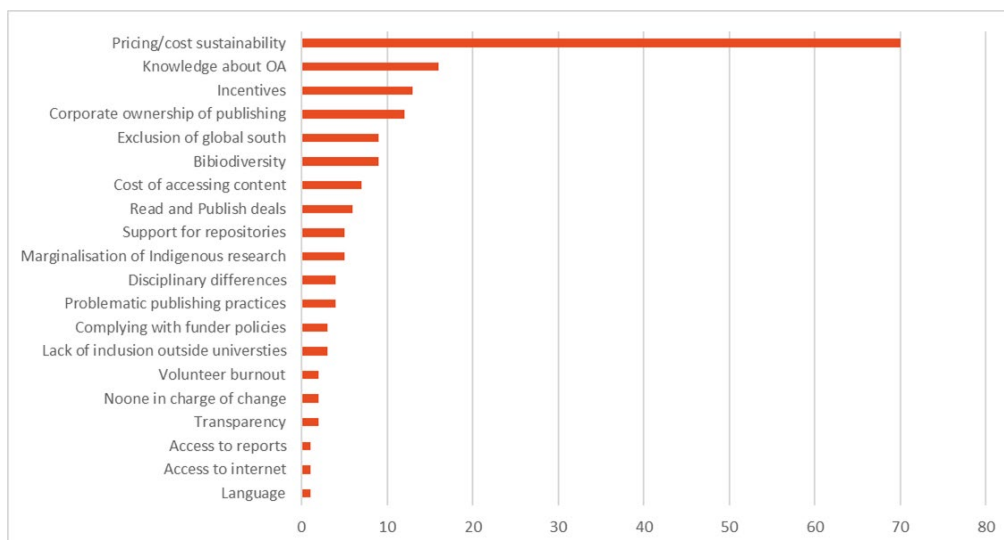
Participants' occupations were collected at registration and showed a predominance from the library sector but researchers, university leadership, and research funders were also represented.

Figure 2: Asia Pacific Regional Workshop Equity in Open Access: participant occupations



Registrants were asked to describe examples of particular issues or difficulties they had encountered regarding equity in open access publishing. The cost to publish open access was the most common problem, along with concerns about incomplete understanding of open access options, lack of institutional incentives, monopoly corporate ownership of the scholarly publishing sector, and exclusion of the Global South and others. The primary concerns were collated into four broad themes that formed the basis of the discussion on challenges.

Figure 3: Registration question: What specific concerns or challenges have you encountered in the context of open access publishing and global equity?



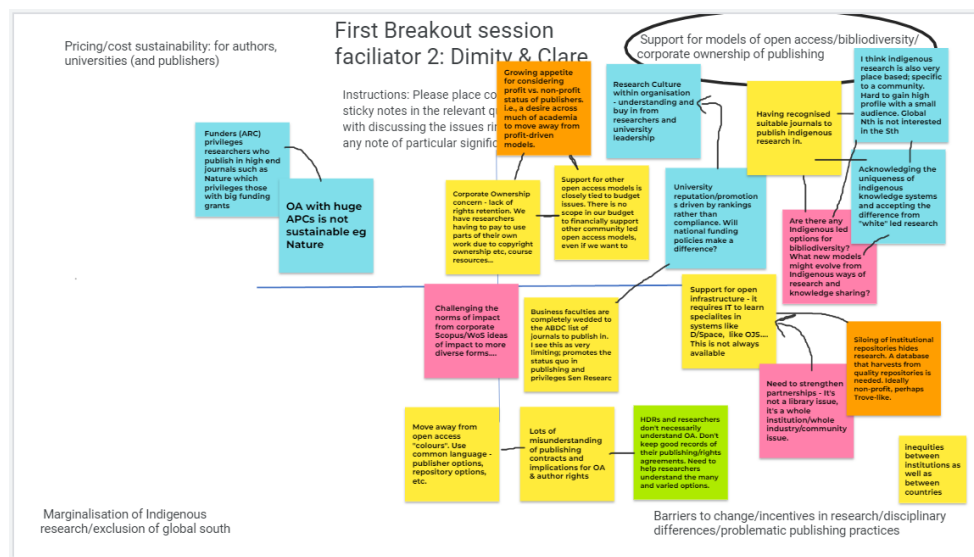
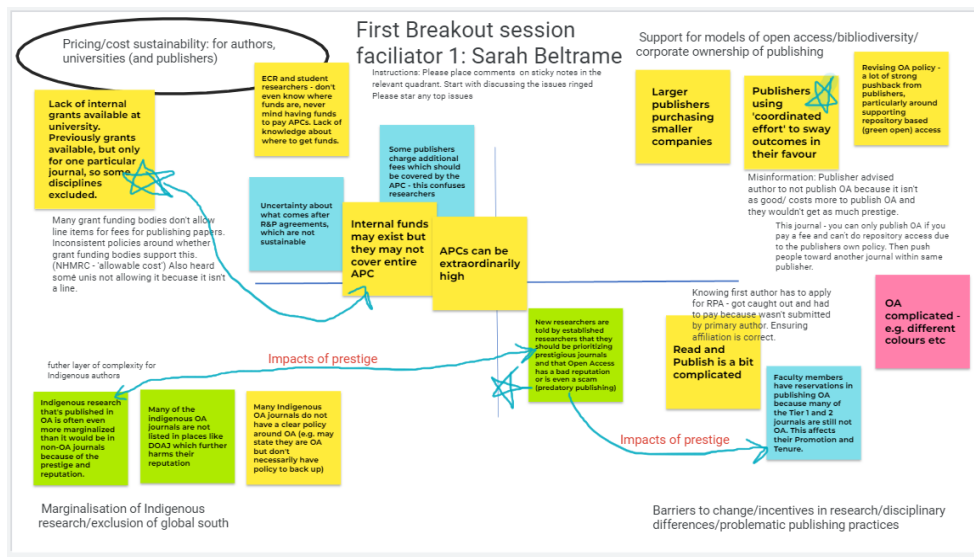
# Challenges

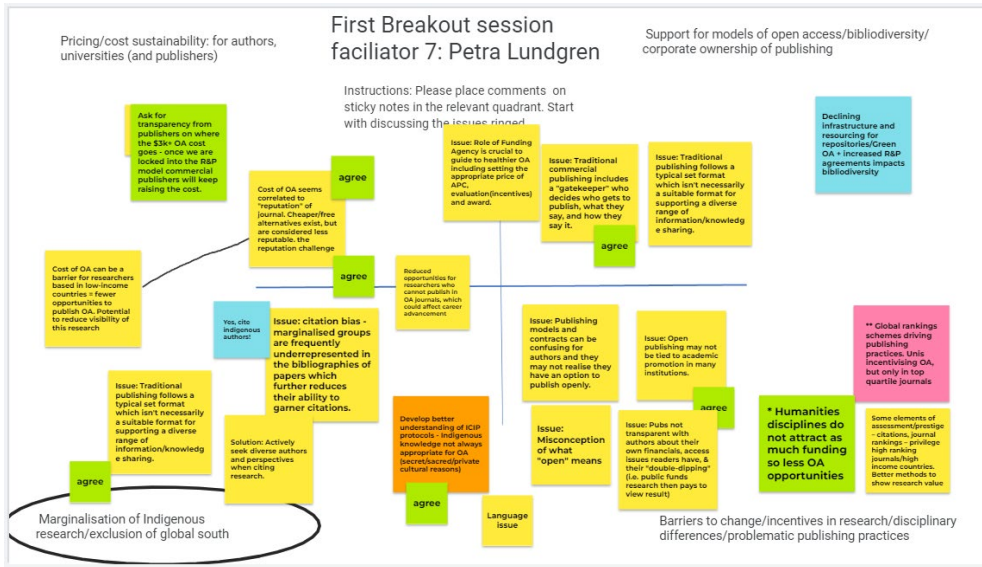
Participants were asked to discuss challenges to global equity in open access publishing in reference to four broad themes:

- Pricing/cost sustainability: for authors, universities (and publishers)
- Support for models of open access/bibliodiversity/ corporate ownership of publishing
- Marginalisation of Indigenous research/exclusion of global south
- Barriers to change/incentives in research/disciplinary differences/problematic publishing practices.

Breakout rooms were used where the conversation was led by a facilitator and each group was asked to concentrate on one of the four themes as randomly assigned.

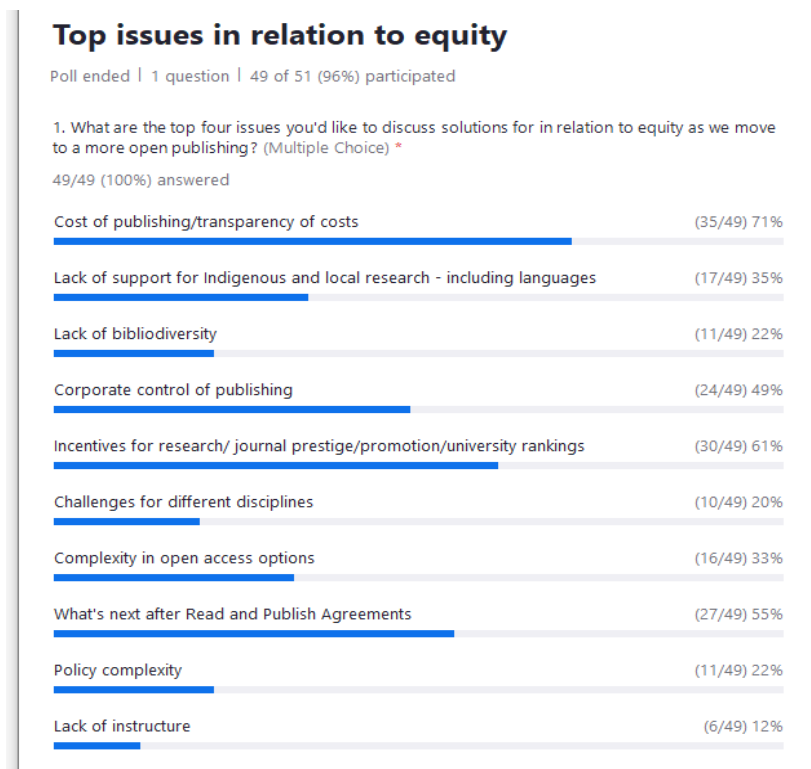
Figure 4: Example breakout room discussions of challenges to equity in open access using Jamboard:





Results of the discussions were then collected into a poll that allowed participants to select the most pressing issues by vote.

Figure 5: Voting results: Top issues in relation to equity.

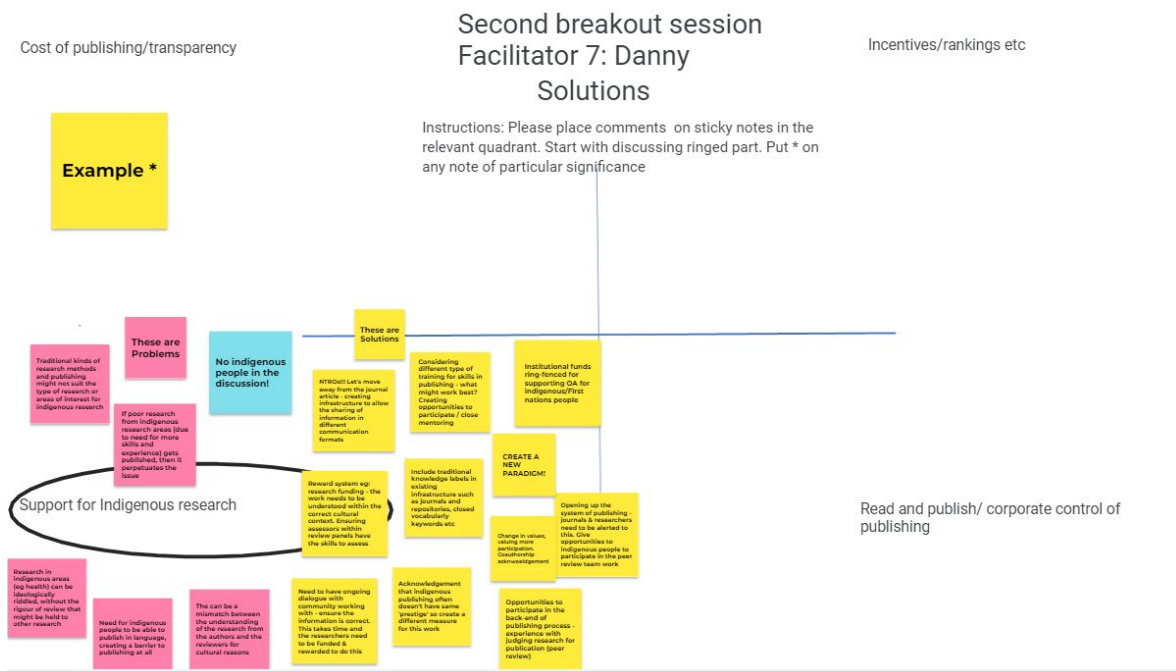


# Solutions

The discussions then turned to finding solutions to the issues that had been identified as priority. Participants were asked to discuss possible solutions in reference to four broad themes:

- The cost of publishing open access and transparency (or lack thereof) around APCs and related publisher expenses
- Incentives for researchers to publish open access and the difficulties of providing these in the current academic culture based on rankings and metrics.
- Ways to support Indigenous research.
- Read and publish agreements and the corporate control of publishing.

Figure 6: Example breakout room discussion of solutions to inequity in open access using Jamboard:



The following recommendations were collated from the discussions as actions to be undertaken:

## The cost of publishing open access and transparency (or lack thereof) around APCs and related publisher expenses

- Bring consortium pressure to bear on publishers to be transparent about costs and profits. Make better reporting by publishers including clear dollar amounts part of read and publish agreements.
- Institutions and funders make repository deposits mandatory with or without publisher embargos. Better support repository infrastructure and staffing to promote and enable increased use of this avenue.

- Create our own publishing resources.
- Levy a fee for research publications on publishers.

### **Incentives for researchers to publish open access and the difficulties of providing these in the current academic culture based on rankings and metrics.**

- University management move away from reliance on journal rankings for assessment and evaluation, focusing on the “research journey” not research metrics.
- Institutions recognise, value and reward open access choices over non open access by researchers and develop open access metrics to increase prestige of these publications.
- Increase awareness and understanding on the part of researchers and senior university management of the extent to which scholarly publishing has become commercialised, dominated by a small number of very large companies with unprecedented power.
- Continually inform university senior leadership and academics of the evolving publishing landscape
- Target early career researchers (ECRs) and postgraduate students to encourage a new academic culture to emerge where open access is normalised and feasible.
- Develop and implement comprehensive institutional Open Scholarship policies with built in monitoring and compliance mechanisms.
- Set university and sector-wide open access targets - for example Aotearoa New Zealand has a target of 70% OA by 2025.
- Support initiatives working towards an alternative assessment culture such as the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#)

### **Ways to support Indigenous research**

- Attain and promote a better understanding of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)
- Further understand and apply Data Sovereignty and CARE Principles
- Make available a collection of practical resources for Indigenous researchers, ensuring these resources are targeted to local culture and context.
- Highlight the importance of Community/Indigenous led initiatives and prioritise these for funding and other support.
- Endorse the assessment of Indigenous research by Indigenous panels and the resulting quality measures and frameworks.
- Recognise that traditional academic types of research and publishing are not necessarily relevant to Indigenous research- accept that a new paradigm is emerging.
- Build in better support for Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTROs)
- Provide and grow opportunities for Indigenous people in the backend of publishing as editors etc.
- Enable systems capable of publishing in Indigenous languages.
- Work to establish a government funded open publishing platform and an open access equity fund prioritising Indigenous research and ECRs
- Give greater weight to Indigenous research in ratings exercises, for example the Aotearoa New Zealand Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF)

## **Read and publish agreements and the corporate control of publishing.**

- Move away from corporate driven impact measures.
- Establish national open repositories.
- Require transparency around costs of publishing and the need for article processing charges (APCs.)
- Update policies & procedures to include rights retention strategies.
- Form partnerships around open-source infrastructure, repository management and preprint servers - sharing the load to make it lighter.
- Establish a working group to look at the future of Read and Publish agreements.
- Require from publishers that Read and Publish agreements be based on principles that are clear and easy to understand.
- Establish more diamond OA journals and help these journals get indexed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) so they are discoverable and credible (events like hackathons)
- Start a conversation about what roles can be crafted for commercial publishers in the new open access world - find opportunities for collaboration? (win/win)
- Build on the decisive messages that some are beginning to send to publishers, for example the resignation of editorial boards, taking more action of this kind.

## **Panel Discussion**

Panellists: Michelle Blake, University Librarian at the University of Waikato and Sandersan Onie, researcher at the Black Dog Institute and Founder of Emotional Health for All, responded to three major questions arising from the workshop.

### **1. What have you heard today as the top priorities in addressing equity as we move to a more open access world? Is this what you expected?**

Michelle expected the main issues to come out of the workshop to be support for Indigenous research, open infrastructure (or lack thereof), where to after Read and Publish agreements, valuing and making audible different voices in research, how we can better work together and author and institutional rights retention.

One of the biggest themes of the discussion has been the need to change the research culture. The region has not yet accepted the need to transition to open access in the same way that Europe has. Researchers and senior academic leadership alike do not have a clear awareness and understanding of why open access is important, making continued advocacy more important than ever. Aotearoa's Universities New Zealand Open Access group is an example of how advocates can continue to nudge the culture towards a more open future.

It is also important to keep the focus on Read and Publish agreements as a transitional moment, not an end in itself. Learning during the discussion about Japan's commitment to green open access was inspirational and resonates with Aotearoa's target of 70% open access by 2025 utilising the repository path. This strategy can only be successful, however, if resourcing and staffing are adequate.



With regard to rights retention, pan-institution, national and international collaboration could provide strengths and opportunities.

Sandy also noted the emphasis in the discussions on the “perverse incentives” in present academic culture and different ways to provide alternatives. Key to this also is the current lack of awareness of the publishing system amongst some key stakeholders. Senior management are largely unaware of the commercialisation of research and publishing, and the challenges involved in trying to shift this system. Incentives form part of a complex ecosystem. If one layer of this system transforms alone it will be left behind: this is a real fear acting against change. Stakeholders need to understand and manage this process with a change management strategy before it will be possible to implement initiatives like DORA.

It is also necessary to start change by building in education at the undergraduate level, so that by the time students become researchers they also understand the research dissemination process, not as an additional add-on but as part of the foundation of their understanding of academic work.

## **2. What solutions have you seen as getting support - and do any of this surprise you, or change your views from before?**

Sandy’s comments focused on ways to preserve Indigenous Knowledge. Even within an established field and operating from within the Western cultural context it is often difficult to make research fit established formats. These formats are not appropriate for Indigenous research, and we need to find ways to value and weigh NTRs without recourse to this mould. This approach must go hand in hand with appreciation, infrastructure and enforcement of Indigenous knowledge sovereignty.

It is no longer a question of what to do but how to get there. We need to think like change managers, identify the stakeholders and the incentives and build a pilot for change.

Michelle addressed the future of Read and Publish agreements and efforts around rights retention. How can we collectively make Read and Publish agreements less complex in this interim period while the future publishing landscape is being worked out? Some researchers are now starting to make decisions about where to publish based on journals’ inclusion in Read and Publish lists rather than where is best for their research. Researchers need to be involved in deciding what kind of future academic publishing we want to create.

Rights retention is important for cost reduction in reducing subscription load or the need to pay to publish open. It can be approached from an institutional level, as Harvard University has done, as a pan university initiative, such as the INATE consortium in the UK, or by a national approach embedded in copyright law (such as in Germany and the Netherlands). There are international examples across the global landscape we can look at and learn from. While institutions can collaborate to help each other, solutions will likely differ to meet local needs.

## **3. Who do you think has responsibility for addressing these priorities and solutions?**

Sandy thought the question might rather be phrased as who has the capacity and resources rather than the responsibility. Who can pull together the consortia to address these issues: It must be done collectively. Different stakeholders must work collectively but may have different priorities and different resources. Those that have the ability to change policy - such as UNESCO - may not understand what is actually happening on the ground which must inform policy: those on the ground - researchers - who do have this knowledge, often do not have the ability to influence outcomes. In

the end it comes down to who is available, who has the resources, and on what scale can change be effectively tested.

Michelle answered this question by giving an example of how it can happen and who is involved, a “coalition of the willing.” Research undertaken on the state of open access in Aotearoa over the last 5 years furnished the evidence to demonstrate to senior stakeholders the advantages of pursuing open access.<sup>6,7</sup> This resulted in the formation of an open access working group by Universities New Zealand which in turn produced a pan-university statement on open access committing universities to a target of 70% open publications by 2025. An educative piece designed for researchers to embed in each institution has also flowed out of the buy-in created by these achievements that were made possible by the original research.

A related example is an influential report from the Aotearoa New Zealand Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor that helped to establish Aotearoa's first funder mandate issued by the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment.<sup>8</sup>

Looking at the experience of universities in the UK negotiating with publishers, there is an obligation on the part of university and senior executives and funding bodies to come to the table. Leadership that can influence change must be involved if these challenges are to be addressed.

## Final thoughts

Sandy reminded us to think about the necessity of holding workshops such as this one to “slowly carve out that blueprint” of what we want for an open future. We must remember too that different parts of the world will move at different paces, take different steps, in different ways. But of all fields, academia is the one perhaps most inclined towards and reliant on collaboration, so we can be certain that these disparate steps will converge in the same broad direction if we are working towards a unified vision.

### Limitations

It was remarked in one of the breakout rooms that the discussion about supporting Indigenous research in that room was taking place without any Indigenous researchers present. Concerted attempts were made by the organising committee to invite and engage with Indigenous researchers and stakeholders and those from other communities marginalised by the current scholarly publishing environment. Greater representation of those directly impacted by inequity in scholarly publishing on the organising committee could have opened up alternative networks to reach out to and possibly higher attendance by these groups which could have altered the direction of the discussions.

It was noticeable that a significant proportion of discussion during the workshop revolved around OA issues not directly related to equity such as how to change the academic ranking/metric-based culture, how to respond to the dominance of commercial publishing interests, and the pros and cons of read and publish agreements. These and others discussed are all hugely important issues for open access and open scholarship but only indirectly touch on equity. This could be reflective of the composition of the participants.

It was noticeable that gender equity issues did not surface in the discussions. Research indicates that the profile of first authors on OA publications tends towards English speaking, white, male researchers in mid or late career.<sup>9</sup> Recent research has shown that many women and gender diverse

scholars have less access to the resources necessary to publish in high APC journals and yet do not feel sufficiently established in their careers to forgo esteemed and older journals for newer OA ones, effectively caught in a catch 22 position. Yet research has also suggested that publishing open access improves the reach of the research of these scholars and brings benefits in terms of citations and collaboration, ultimately helping their research career trajectory.<sup>10</sup> Unpacking these kinds of dilemmas could be a useful addition to future discussion.

## **Next steps**

- Open Access Australasia continues to accept and collect ideas on these topics. Email [contact@oaaustralasia.org](mailto:contact@oaaustralasia.org)
- The work of this Asia Pacific Region workshop will inform the next one in the Americas.
- After the third and final workshop, Open Access Australasia will convene a roundup webinar with representatives from all three workshops to discuss the actions to be taken going forward resulting from these discussions.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Website

- [Website with presentation and videos](#)
- <https://oaaustralasia.org/events/asia-pacific-regional-workshop-on-equity-in-open-access/>

## Appendix 2: Attendance

Asia Pacific Regional Workshop on Equity in Open Access. Thursday, June 1st, 2023 11:00 AM - 2 PM AEST.

- Coordination: Ginny Barbour (OAA) and Janet Catterall (OAA)
- Technical: Sandra Fry (OAA)
- Facilitators: Sarah Beltrame (Australian Catholic University); Clare Thorpe (University of the Sunshine Coast); Dimity Flanagan (University of Melbourne); Fiona Bradley (University of New South Wales); David Groenewegen (Monash University); Michelle Blake (University of Waikato); Sandersan Onie (Black Dog Institute); Petra Lundgren (ISC); Danny Kingsley (Flinders University)
- Panellists: Sandersan Onie; Michelle Blake; Madhan Madhu, Director Library, O P Jindal Global University, Sonipat and DST-CPR (unable to attend on the day)
- Audience: 167 registered: 91 joined for part 1; 60 participated throughout.

## Appendix 3: Videos

Videos available for viewing at <https://oaaustralasia.org/2023/06/01/asia-pacific-equity-workshop-videos/>

Vignettes (in order of viewing) contributed by:

- Colleen Campbell, OA 2020
- Kim Tairi, University Librarian, Auckland University of Technology, Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Katherine Herbert, Lecturer in Blended Learning & PhD Candidate, Australian Catholic University, Australia.
- Jayshree Mamtora, Manager Scholarly Communications, James Cook University, Australia.
- Moumita Koley, Visiting Researcher, DST-CPR, IISc, Bangalore
- Jessica Thiel, Postdoctoral Researcher, Queensland University of Technology, Australia
- Luqman Hayes, Research Services Senior Manager, Auckland University of Technology, Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Alan Clough, Professorial Research Fellow, James Cook University, Australia.
- Vanessa Tuckfield, Copyright Manager, Libraries Directorate, Australian Catholic University, Australia
- Neda Zdravkovic, Auckland Institute of Studies Librarian, New Zealand