

Humanities Researchers and Open Access: Opportunities for Curtin University

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Revision History

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Executive Summary

Curtin University Library want to provide better support for their community of humanities researchers, and engaged a Master of Information Management student to carry out a research project. This research project explored the experiences of open access (OA) among humanities researchers at Curtin University, and gained a better understanding of the factors preventing these researchers from sharing more of their research outputs as OA.

Six experienced humanities researchers at Curtin University were interviewed between November 2020 and January 2021, and interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. The research found that while researchers are aware of the benefits of OA, they are limited in their engagement with OA due to multiple blocking factors. These blocking factors vary depending on whether the research output is journal articles, books, non-traditional research outputs (NTROs) or grey literature. The Curtin University researchers interviewed expressed similar perceptions and blocking factors as researchers from other institutions represented in the literature review.

Key findings include a lack of OA journal article options; a lack of knowledge of how OA books work; frustration with adding NTROs to Elements and espace; and not considering grey literature for inclusion in espace. The detailed research findings are presented as opportunities, and the potential outcome if each opportunity is adopted. Consultation with the Research Office at Curtin and the humanities research community is essential for all future changes to Elements and espace. Better representation of this community will ensure that its diverse research outputs and strong connections with industry are recognised, and available to all as open access.

1 Introduction

Curtin University Library invited Niamh Quigley to undertake a research project as her Master of Information Management thesis. This was part of a wider initiative by Curtin Library to better support their humanities research community. This project was undertaken between August 2020 and May 2021, and the resulting dissertation titled 'Engagement with Open Access Among Curtin University Humanities Researchers: Exploring the Perceptions of, and Barriers to Open Access' will be available in eSpace.

This research report has the following format:

- describes the research approach
- summarises key findings
- identifies insights, corresponding opportunities and potential outcomes.

2 Research Project Approach

This project aimed to learn about the experiences of OA among six humanities researchers at Curtin University, with the following research questions agreed in consultation with the Library:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of humanities researchers at Curtin University about publishing journal articles as OA?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of humanities researchers at Curtin University about publishing monographs and book chapters as OA?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of humanities researchers at Curtin University about sharing NTROs and grey literature as OA?

RQ4: What are the factors blocking Curtin humanities researchers from sharing their research outputs as OA?

At Curtin University the Faculty of Humanities includes: the School of Design and the Built Environment; the School of Education; and the School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry. A population of researchers from this faculty with multiple publications, and some evidence of OA in their publication record was identified by checking Curtin University website profile pages. All six researchers who agreed to participate were also research supervisors, and some held editorial roles at journals.

The researcher interviewed the participants between November 2020 and January 2021, with approval from Curtin University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Following transcription, the researcher analysed the data using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach¹. The total duration of the interviews was approximately six hours, and the deidentified interview transcripts² and interview guide³ are publicly available in the Zenodo repository.

¹ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

² Quigley, N. (2021 a). HRE 2020-0598 research data: Interview transcripts [Data set]. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4774447>

³ Quigley, N. (2021 b). HRE 2020-0598 research data: Interview guide. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4774475>

3 Key Findings

There's the principal of open access which I get, the model needs to catch up. I mean that in so many ways, [...] repositories [...] the way the publishing industry works, [...] what we ask for from funding bodies. (Participant 1)

This research found that participants want more guidance and support on OA; they don't have enough time to evaluate OA opportunities; and they find eSpace confusing and tedious. The Curtin University researchers interviewed expressed similar perceptions and blocking factors to the researchers represented in the literature review. The key findings for the perceptions of OA are:

Journals – All participants are aware of the benefits of OA (citations, wider audience, fast to publish, industry can access)

Books – Participants understand the advantages of OA books (wider audience), but have almost no experience and don't know where to start.

NTRs – Participants want to share their NTRs as OA, but find Elements and eSpace frustrating as they are designed for articles and books.

Grey literature – Participants have excellent connections with industry and are creating grey literature, but much of it is not in eSpace.

Section 4 'Insights and Opportunities' explores the blocking factors to OA in more detail, and presents opportunities with potential outcomes.

4 Insights and Opportunities

Interview participants provided many insights on what is preventing them from making more of their research outputs available as OA. This section reframes these insights as opportunities, along with the potential outcomes if the opportunities are adopted:

- **OA Journal article insights**
OA knowledge gaps; cannot afford APCs; inconsistent opinions on OA; limited OA journal options; publisher advice on OA; and not asking funders for OA publication costs.
- **OA Book insights**
Lack of knowledge; perception that OA books cannot make money; dependence on prestigious book publishers; and not availing of funders OA publication costs.
- **OA NTRO insights**
espace, Elements and Script are not configured/designed for NTROs; and some NTROs in espace have link to other website instead of copy of object.
- **OA Grey literature insights**
Researchers do not consider some of their grey literature as eligible for espace.

This section concludes with points of intervention for these opportunities.

4.1 Journal Article Opportunities (RQ1 & RQ4)

	Insight	Opportunity	Outcome
A1	<p>Researchers have knowledge gaps for multiple OA concepts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsure about difference between green and gold • Instead of checking journal OA policies before submission of article, they are checking OA policies after acceptance • Low awareness of Sherpa Romeo website to check journal policies • Poor understanding of espace's purpose, and that it is indexed by Google Scholar • Fear of predatory journals, and association of predatory journals with OA. 	<p>Target these knowledge gaps in education on OA.</p>	<p>Better understanding of OA among research supervisors.</p> <p>Improved OA knowledge will trickle down to supervised students.</p>
A2	<p>Cannot afford APC-based gold OA.</p>	<p>Additional APC funding internally may not be possible. See A7 for how OA publication costs can be covered for funded research.</p> <p>Identify OA opportunities for humanities researchers without APCs.</p>	<p>Potential increase in OA publishing.</p>
A3	<p>Some individual researchers do not hold a consistent opinion on OA, and some perceive too much OA publication as negative. Even researchers who support OA urge their students to be cautious.</p>	<p>Recognise that researchers hold multiple roles including funding assessor, editorial role at journal, research supervisor and a global citizen perspective. Some of these roles do not favour OA due to dependence on prestigious publications for career advancement.</p>	<p>A better understanding of humanities researchers' perceptions of OA, and how they influence the students they supervise.</p>

<p>A4</p>	<p>Specialised humanities research has limited OA article publishing options.</p>	<p>Identify specific journals that Curtin humanities researchers publish in, and support them where there is zero embargo green OA for sharing on personal websites.</p> <p>Reconcile journals that humanities researchers are publishing in with any transformative agreements and let researchers know.</p>	<p>Potential increase in OA – both green and under transformative agreements.</p>
<p>A5</p>	<p>Big publishers are sharing OA information at seminars for Curtin researchers. Advice from these publishers is biased towards their profit stream from paid APCs, and could potentially misinform humanities researchers on OA publishing.</p> <p>The email invites to these seminars are library branded, which could be seen as an endorsement for the advice in these seminars.</p>	<p>Be clear to researchers where publishing advice about OA is biased due to the interests of the presenters.</p>	<p>Researchers will be aware that advice on OA from profit-motivated publishers is biased.</p>
<p>A6</p>	<p>Some researchers who are also on journal editorial boards can use APC-based gold waivers to publish for free.</p>	<p>APC-based gold OA publishing is happening without funding. The Library/ROC could explore this in more depth, and monitor how much APC-based gold OA is being propped up by waivers.</p>	<p>The levels of OA at Curtin University could decline if these researchers who are also on journal editorial boards leave.</p>

<p>A7</p>	<p>Uncertainty over asking funders for OA publication costs.</p>	<p>One humanities funder, the Australian Research Council allows the use of grant funds for “publication and dissemination of project research outputs and outreach activity”. For an example see their Linkage Program grant guidelines⁴.</p> <p>This is an opportunity for Curtin University and ROC to clarify and communicate to researchers at an institutional level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For funding applicants – which funding bodies accept costings in grant applications and to what limits • For funding assessors – which funding bodies accept costings in grant applications and to what limits so that they are aware of reasonable and permitted costs • For funding recipients – what are their OA publication obligations, so that this is clear before submission of research outputs for publication. 	<p>More funding applicants will request and use funder money for OA publication costs.</p> <p>More APC-based gold articles with no additional cost to the Library or Curtin University.</p>
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⁴ Page 18, Australian Research Council. (2021). Linkage projects: Grant guidelines 2019 edition. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2019L01488/Download>

4.2 Book Opportunities (RQ2 & RQ4)

	Insight	Opportunity	Outcome
B1	Researchers are interested in the idea of OA books, but don't know where to start.	<p>More promotion of the idea of OA books. See the OA Books Toolkit for resources⁵.</p> <p>Promote relevant OA books to Curtin humanities researchers. For example, The Australian Open Educational Practice Special Interest Group shares new OA books⁶.</p> <p>Consider supporting further OA books by Curtin humanities researchers.</p>	<p>More OA books available for Curtin students to access and use.</p> <p>Shows Curtin University's commitment to OA.</p>
B2	Some participants benefit from royalties on books, and perceive OA publication as not profitable.	Show examples of books which are OA for the digital version, but can also be purchased in print.	Understanding among researchers that books with OA digital versions can be sold in print form.
B3	Researchers are dependent on prestigious publishers for promotion.	Support the DORA principles (Declaration on Research Assessment) ⁷ where possible, so that research impact and quality are prioritised over prestige ⁸ .	Make a positive contribution to a movement that is attempting to decouple from dependence on prestigious publishers.
B4	Some funders permit book subvention costs (for non-OA books).	Where funders permit book publication costs, guide researchers to apply for OA Book Processing Charges (BPCs) instead of subventions.	<p>OA book publication covered by funder, at no cost to Curtin University.</p> <p>Shows Curtin University's commitment to OA.</p>

⁵ <https://oabooks-toolkit.org/>

⁶ <https://oepoz.wordpress.com/oep-digest-monthly/>

⁷ <https://sfedora.org/>

⁸ <https://oabooks-toolkit.org/article/13606437-common-myths-about-open-access>

4.3 NTRO Opportunities (RQ3 & RQ4)

	Insight	Opportunity	Outcome
C1	espace and Elements are not designed for NTROs, causing humanities researchers to disengage with them.	Consult with humanities researchers and implement changes to Elements so that metadata for NTROs can be collected, or identify an alternative repository. Ensure improvements to NTRO metadata in Elements flow through to espace.	espace download metrics and citations provide a way to demonstrate research impact, in line with Curtin University's Strategic Plan. ⁹ Humanities researchers will be better reflected in the systems they use.
C2	Script is not designed for NTROs, causing funding and promotion applications to be more laborious for some humanities researchers.	Consult with humanities researchers and implement changes to Script, or any replacement research management system. This should enable the extraction of more meaningful research output reports that reflect the type of NTRO produced, rather than pages of 'Other'.	Humanities researchers will have more meaningful reports from Script, with less editing and justification required when applying for funding and promotion.
C3	Some NTRO objects are not in espace, therefore not properly included in the collection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some NTRO records are just metadata with no object or link • Some NTROs have links to the object on third-party websites, making them vulnerable to third-party website loss. 	Consult with humanities researchers so that more objects are available as OA in espace e.g. a photo of an artwork or a video rather than just a description. Any addition of NTRO objects should consider copyright, confidentiality, funding considerations and privacy issues.	More NTROs are OA, findable and citable. NTRO objects are included within the espace collection. espace download metrics and citations provide a way to demonstrate research impact.

⁹ Page 5, Curtin University (2017). Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022. https://strategicplan.curtin.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2020/11/CurtinStrategicPlan_2017-2022.pdf

4.4 Grey Literature Opportunities (RQ3 & RQ4)

	Insight	Opportunity	Outcome
D1	<p>Researchers are producing grey literature but do not always consider adding it to espace. Grey literature examples mentioned during interviews included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations, research reports for industry partners in built environment • Best practice research summaries in magazines and newsletters for educators via teacher associations • Creative writing and articles for art industry publications. 	<p>Individual consultations with researchers to identify grey literature they are already creating, but not in espace.</p> <p>Create a clear collection policy for espace to define what grey literature is collected.</p> <p>Provide examples of grey literature specific to the humanities, so that researchers know what they can add to espace.</p>	<p>More grey literature in espace that is OA, findable and citable.</p> <p>espace download metrics and citations provide a way to demonstrate research impact, in line with Curtin University's Strategic Plan.¹⁰</p> <p>Strengthened connections with industry partners by providing them with a citable source for their collaborations with Curtin researchers.</p> <p>Recognition for the effort of researchers in building relationships with, and impacting industry. They are doing this in addition to producing scholarly outputs.</p>

¹⁰ Page 5, Curtin University (2017). Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022. https://strategicplan.curtin.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2020/11/CurtinStrategicPlan_2017-2022.pdf

4.5 Points of Intervention

Although Curtin Library is responsible for espace and ensuring as many Curtin research outputs as possible are OA, they do not have control over Elements which is the entry point for the OA workflow. The responsibility for Elements lies with the Research Office at Curtin (ROC). ROC is therefore a stakeholder in the success of OA at Curtin, and consultation with ROC and humanities researchers is essential. There are several points of intervention for the opportunities presented above:

1. **Library education on OA**

As evidenced by the knowledge gaps for OA journal articles (see A1), the current resources provided by Curtin Library are not getting through to all researchers. Further research is suggested to identify how other academic libraries provide education on OA.

2. **Individual consultation with researchers**

The multiple blocking factors shared by participants highlight how difficult humanities researchers find it to make their research available as OA, and suggests that an increase in OA is unlikely without intervention. During interviews, researchers were interested in making more of their research outputs available as OA. Consultation with individual researchers is suggested to find out the unique ways in which they are communicating with industry, and guidance to help them to make their outputs OA.

3. **Library presentations on OA during research supervisor training**

Some research supervisors are not confident enough in their OA experiences and knowledge to give advice to their students. This could be an opportunity for more inclusion of OA education in research supervisor training.

4. **Include most significant publications as part of promotions process**

One novel approach from James Cook University (JCU) is to ask academics to name their three most significant publications as part of the academic promotions process, where all publications nominated must be available as OA¹¹. This has provided an opportunity for JCU library to assist academics in making their publications available as OA, and could be considered at Curtin University for inclusion in the academic promotion process.

¹¹ Ovaska, C., & Luetchford, A. (2021, April 2). Academic promotions and researcher OA motivation. Research Support Community Day. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vqiP7nB2alM0zaOqQEFxbbMiqBDfi6wa/edit>

5 Conclusion

The aim of this project was to uncover the perceptions of humanities researchers towards OA, and identify the blocking factors which prevent them from publishing more of their research as OA. This goal was met, thanks to the openness of the six humanities researchers interviewed. The opportunities presented here require changes to systems, and additional resources. Making more humanities research outputs available as OA has the potential to highlight their diversity and impact on industry. However, humanities researchers will be unable to engage fully with OA while they are forced to publish with established prestigious journals and publishers to advance their careers.