SOUTH AFRICA'S JOURNEY TOWARDS OPEN ACCESS TO SCHOLARLY JOURNALS

Briefing Document 1

UNIVERSITIES
SOUTH AFRICA

BACKGROUND
AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The history of South Africa's higher education sector and the science system more generally has resulted in the legacy of deeply unequal access to scholarly journals and information databases. The impact of this on broadening the development of scholarly activities across the 26 public universities and the rest of South Africa's knowledge system is immense and there is a national consensus that this has to be corrected.

The project of trying to ensure access to journal and other information databases to all South African scholars and students at South African universities has given rise to a large project coordinated by Universities SA (USAf), the Academy of Science of SA (ASSAf), the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the National Research Foundation (NRF) and the South African National Library and Information Consortium (SANLiC). The cost of procuring reading access to journals and other information databases is deeply prohibitive for most South African universities and hence for a significant number of scholars and students.

The context within which this project is undertaken is one that continues to be deeply influenced by our apartheid past which resulted in a very fragmented system with significant differences in capacity to address many basic needs, one of which is access to journals and other information databases. Amongst university leaders there is a strong consensus that the procurement of research information and data

should move towards a platform that gives equal access to all South African scholars and students.

The other side of this context includes the galloping rate at which the cost of journals is increasing because of the nature of the publishing industry and weakening of the rand, the combination of which is rapidly crippling the capacity of the South African research system to guarantee even the current limited access to scientific information as we head into the future. There is no question that there needs to be a change of model to secure this broadened access.

On the one hand, at a more national level, this project has to be seen in the context of the open science policy framework that the Department of Science and Technology (DST) is working towards and which is contained in the new STI White Paper, published in February 2019. This project is a small but important subset of that very significant project. On the other hand, at the global level there are large national and international projects and movements aimed at producing an open access basis to scientific information through direct engagement with the publishing industry. While South Africa's science system is small in comparison with other national systems and is therefore less able to be a direct influence on the way in which new systems are evolving, it is large enough for it to make an impact when working in alliances with other national systems.

WHAT IS
OA2020?

"OA2020 is a global initiative to propel open access forward by fostering and inciting the transformation of today's scholarly journals from the current subscription (paywall) system to new open access publishing models that enable unrestricted use and re-use of scholarly outputs and assure transparency and sustainability of publishing costs.

"Even though Open Access is now a shared vision of the world's academic communities, research councils, and funding bodies, nearly 85% of the world's scholarly outputs are still locked behind paywalls, inhibiting the full impact of research and putting enormous strain on institutional budgets.

"The new publishing initiatives and other efforts of the past twenty years have made some headway, but progress is slow. In order to finally make Open Access the default in scholarly communications, we need a strategy that rapidly addresses the bulk of today's scholarly journals. We cannot continue to sustain subscription price increases which monopolize institutional budgets, and we cannot wait any longer for the desired benefits of an open information environment."

WHY DO WE NEED THE OA2020 INITIATIVE?

"We are spending too much money. Even in stable economic environments, subscription prices have risen 60% in the past decade (versus ~16% of standard inflation) and continue to rise. But that is not all: "hybrid" publishing of OA articles in subscription journals has allowed publishers to the phenomenon of "double dipping", in which publishers extract even more money from funders and the academic community.

"We want to have more impact now. Over 15 years ago, the academic community defined what would be the terms of access to research in the 21st century: Open Access. Despite the many laudable efforts that have been undertaken in the past, only ~15% of research outputs are freely available on publication; at this rate, it will take decades before our research will be fully accessible and re-usable by the entire scientific community.

"We want to take back the power. The current lack of competition allows an unchallenged oligopoly of "legacy" publishers to hold the vast majority of scientific articles in a subscription journal deadlock, obligating researchers to surrender full rights on the use and re-use of their work and extracting over $2 billion in profits annually, with profit margins of 30-40%, from libraries and their institutions.

"We want to foster innovation. The paywall system is a relic of the print age, which hinders the full potential of digital environments and is out of sync with the demands of 21st century research, which should be based on ability to freely interrogate and share the world's scientific outputs. We need innovative publishing services that will improve, not impede, the research process.

"We need to rationalize our precious time. Funder, Institutional and discipline-based Repositories have their essential role in disseminating research, but they are slow to be populated and come with time-consuming and, often, confusing compliance and deposit processes that are frustrating for researchers and libraries alike.

"We need a solution based on evidence. The MPDL White Paper illustrated that there is more than enough money in the publishing system to sustain a transformation of today's scholarly journals from subscription to open access, and the Pay it Forward Project concluded with similar findings. The success of SCOAP3 is evidence that established journals can feasibly and sustainably be converted from subscription to open access.

We need to level the playing field. Researchers and, indeed, the majority of the world's higher education systems, rely on the publishing services and brand value offered under the current journal system, but the market power of "legacy" publishers stands in the way of developing and adopting new forms of tenure and promotion.

We need a rapid, sustainable path to a fully Open Access environment. Pressure is building on all sides: disruptive elements like SciHub threaten to undermine the entire chain of scholarly communications and institutional budgets are stretched to the breaking point. A number of national HE and Library consortia have taken a giant first step forward, negotiating transitional "offset agreements", but unless the community quickly and collectively moves on with a next step in the transition, we run the risk of even these initial agreements becoming "business as usual".

The key to success is in the hands of the world's research organizations, as they decide how to allocate their funds. A broad, global consensus among these organizations to withdraw all spending from journal subscriptions and re-allocate those resources to open access publishing initiatives and services in accordance with their own, community-specific OA publishing preferences.

THE GOALS OF OA2020

While continuing to support the development of other open access strategies, OA2020 aims to:

- Transform the core of today's scholarly journals from subscription to OA publishing in accordance with community-specific publication preferences.

- Pursue this transformation process by converting resources currently spent on journal subscriptions into funds to support sustainable OA business models.

- Engage all parties involved in scholarly publishing, in particular universities, research institutions, funders, libraries, and publishers in transformative actions to achieve a rapid and efficient transition for the benefit of scholarship and society at large.

*This information is taken from the OA2020 website.

SOUTH AFRICA'S
JOURNEY TO DATE

- A convergence of a number of initiatives from Universities SA, DHET and DST resulted in the establishment of a set of projects to understand how best to procure a national site licence for journals and other information databases. This was given impetus by DHET and DST when they commissioned a study carried out by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) on the ways in which the institutions in the National System of Innovation were procuring journals and the cost of such procurement. This study was done in 2010, and looked both at subscription payments as well the payments for Article Publishing Charges (APCs).

- While much has changed since this study was done, at its completion it was clear that the costs related to the procurement of **national site licences** was prohibitively large, which in turn indicated the need for the consideration of new models.

- USAf convened a small task team – involving USAf, SANLiC, NRF, DHET and ASSAf – to understand how best to take this process forward. It was at this time that momentum was being generated in Europe in a challenge to the major publishing houses for the development of a new system of provision of scientific information and data that was essentially captured in the OA2020 project which was fully formulated in 2015.

- The OA2020 project calls on the publishing houses to flip their journals from being "pay to read" to "pay to publish". In other words, the argument put forward is that the once payments (APCs) were made for journal articles to be published that they would then be moved into a state of global open access. Together with returning copyright to the author, this model is what is referred to as **new transformative agreements** as a way to move towards more complete open access.

- USAf and SANLiC convened two workshops for librarians and other decisionmakers to provide them with a clear understanding of the nature of the OA2020 project – this is described fully below. Ralf Schimmer of the Max Planck Digital Library was invited to provide librarians and research managers with an opportunity to engage the ideas of OA2020 and to determine its relevance to South Africa and what next steps were necessary if we were to enhance our capacity to negotiate effectively with the publishing companies towards such an end.

- At the last USAf Board meeting of 2018, a unanimous position was adopted by the vice-chancellors to align our universities with the OA2020 project with the aim of securing open access to all journal articles through this flipped model – to move from "pay to read" to a "pay to publish".

- Discussions with the science councils and the government departments are under way to bring them into the envelope as well.

- South Africa, via SANLiC, has adopted a consortium-based negotiations approach to strike up contracts with the publishing houses some of which extend just to the end of 2019. There is a need therefore, to proceed with haste with developing a national position on this matter and to prepare for a new era of negotiations. SANLiC is not the only body that negotiates on behalf of the South African National System of Innovation but it does represent the system on about R500 million of procurement.

14th BERLIN OPEN ACCESS CONFERENCE

At the 14th OA2020 meeting in Berlin in December 2018, China committed itself to the OA2020 route and so did the University of California system. It was also announced that Sweden had cancelled its contract with Elsevier to pressurise it to come to the negotiating table to strike up a "pay to publish" model rather than the "pay to read" one. Germany, the UC system, the Netherlands and Norway have all moved toward aligning themselves with the Swedes. The South African delegation to this meeting, representing USAf, the NRF and SANLiC made important contributions.

The declaration below flowed from that important Berlin meeting.

Final conference statement

Participants from 37 nations and five continents, representing research performing and research funding institutions, libraries and government higher education associations and rectors' conferences, associations of researchers and other open access initiatives gathered at the 14th Berlin Open Access Conference held 3-4 December 2018 in Berlin. They affirmed that there is a strong alignment among the approaches taken by OA2020, Plan S, the Jussieu Call and others to facilitate a full and complete transition to open access. The statement that follows represents the strong consensus of all of those represented at the meeting.

- *We are all committed to authors retaining their copyrights,*
- *We are all committed to complete and immediate open access,*
- *We are all committed to accelerating the progress of open access through transformative agreements that are temporary and transitional, with a shift to full open access within a very few years. These agreements should, at least initially, be cost-neutral, with the expectation that economic adjustments will follow as the markets transform.*

Publishers are expected to work with all members of the global research community to effect complete and immediate open access according to this statement.

This declaration, which brings together a number of large national and international initiatives, may provide a platform for a South African campaign to ensure open access to scholarly journals.

NEXT STEPS
FOR US IN SOUTH AFRICA

If we assume that the current situation of fragmented access is not acceptable and if we agree with the idea that we should be moving towards an open science approach especially where there is public expenditure of research and development, then we have as a National System of Innovation to move towards new approaches to open access.

In this case it would be most effective for us to work with international partners so as to enhance the negotiating power of the 'academy'.

**But there is need to move with much haste
if some of our current negotiations
are to be impacted.**

Next Steps

1. **Convenings.** To reconvene meetings of academics, librarians and research managers to develop a working consensus on how to proceed. SANLiC's Annual Conference in June this year (Tuesday 25 – midday Thursday 27 June) provides a concentrated opportunity for such engagement. There are a number of key representatives from the OA2020 movement that will be presenting at the conference and they have agreed to stay on to workshop with research DVCs, research managers, library directors and other key stakeholders. These include:

   - Colleen Campbell, Max Planck Digital Library.

   - Professor Jeffrey MacKie-Mason from University of California

   - Mathew Willmott, Open Access Collection Strategist, California Digital Library, University of California. He is the mastermind behind the Pay it Forward Project.

   There will also be many presentations of relevance at the conference itself including a panel discussion on transformative agreements which will include representatives from Projekt DEAL, Wiley, the Max Planck Digital Library and the University of California.
   (USAf and SANLiC)

2. **Relationship with OA2020.** Maintain and build our relationship with OA2020 so as to so as to strengthen the global impact on the development of new business models for access to journals and information databases. It will be important to have a South Africa voice at this table.
   (USAf, NRF and SANLiC)

3. **Data Collection.** The ASSAf study provides the basis for the kinds of data that are required. However, that data is now 9-10 years old and there is need to repeat these studies. What data is required?

   - There is need to determine exactly how much is currently paid by institutions in the NSI on (a) subscriptions, (b) APCs and (c) to which publishing houses.

   - Data analysis is required to determine exactly the journals that South African scholars are publishing in.

   - Data analysis is required to determine the extent to which South African scholars are publishing in collaboration with scholars in other countries.

   It may be necessary to hire a person to help with this data collection. It has to be done rapidly so that we are in time to shift the agenda during the next round of negotiations in 2020. This work is absolutely vital to the development of what in OA2020 language are ***transformative agreements*** – these are agreements that in the first instance seek to move our systems out of a "pay to read" framework into a "pay to publish" on the basis that copyright will reside with individual authors and that there **will not be additional investment** in these agreements than is currently expended through payments towards subscription and APCs. Discussions will be held with USAf's Finance Executives Forum (FEF) to work out what the most effective
   (The NSLOAP Team)

4. **Engagement on the Governance Model.** The move away from an institution-by-institution approach to a national approach will require the development of a governance model, and especially as this model will have to reach across institutions that are supported by different government departments. This will have to take into account the institutional autonomy of universities and the historical context in which the research system finds itself. A series of urgent discussions will be held for the development of a proposal.
   (USAf and NRF will work on a draft governance framework)

5. **Aggregation of National Spend on Journals and Databases.** Moving towards an open access model will depend on the aggregation of current spending on subscriptions and on APCs. There would have to be a discussion about how this will be achieved and in particular whether this will be through some sort of top-slicing process.
   (USAf, DHET, DST, Treasury)

6. **Contacts at Institutions.** USAf did put out a call to institutions to provide the names and contact details of contact points on the open access project. These have been received and collated. The same will have to be done with the science councils and other relevant institutions. The NRF will play this role for the science councils.
   (USAf and NRF)

7. **The Design of a Roadmap.** The advice we have received from OA2020 is that it is important to develop a national roadmap to guide South Africa's negotiations on its path towards an open access paradigm. A draft has been designed and will be shared with institutions shortly.
   (The NSLOAP Team)

Some concluding thoughts

The success of the OA2020 campaigns in other national systems is driven by the level of consensus that exists in those scholarly communities. This requires engagement and discussion.

There is need for urgency since the negotiations for the next set of contracts have already begun.

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