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### **Open Access and Academic Research in Malta**

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Should information be free? This is the current hot topic in the world of academia. There is an increasing demand for research to be accessible by everyone. Funding bodies are being requested to make research easily accessible and available on Institutional Repositories (IRs). The Open Access (OA) movement has been gaining momentum ever since the European Scientific Council mandated that EU, fully or partially funded research, should be available in OA whether by publishing in OA journals or uploading the research on Institutional Repositories that cater for OA. Several countries took it a step further by implementing national OA policies, which imply that research funded by national institutions should also be in OA. Countries like the UK and the Netherlands have seen an impressive increase in Universities and institutions adopting OA policies within their own repositories.

In practical terms, what does OA mean? OA is defined as the free, immediate availability of research articles on the public internet, permitting any users to read, download, distribute, print, search or link to the full texts of these articles, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on use, reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited.

OA has the power to transform the way research and scientific inquiry is conducted. It has direct and widespread implications for both the academia and industry, and for society as a whole. OA has the potential to maximize research investments, increase the exposure and use of published research, facilitate the ability to conduct research across available literature and enhance the overall advancement of scholarship.

At its core, OA creates a cycle of information that can only grow by time. A researcher who publishes research in OA will be contributing to the scholarly and scientific community in general. The researcher will also provide other scholars with areas and topics for further research either directly or indirectly, thus research creates more research. This will be of benefit to the researcher, the institution, the academic community, and the wider world.

The University of Malta (UoM) launched OAR@UoM, its Institutional Repository (IR), in September 2014. Participating in pan-European projects, such as OpenAIRE2020 and PASTEUR4OA, the UoM Library is also playing an active role in promoting OA. The UoM Library also acts as the National Point of Reference for OA within the EU.

OAR@UoM provides a platform for academics to put their research in OA. The ultimate goal is to have a system in place where research created by the University is preserved and also showcased online in Open Access. OAR@UoM is a powerful tool that researchers need to use to increase the visibility of their research and also that of the Institution supporting the research. To date, there are over 4,000 different authors who have items deposited on OAR@UoM with over 8,000 different subject headings used to classify the increasing volume of items being submitted. There are over 1,100 different articles, 226 recordings, 30 books and over 1,500 dissertations. This platform also gives the opportunity to local journal publishers to upload their issues thus increasing visibility and accessibility whilst supporting preservation. Since OAR@UoM is the only IR in Malta, it is also serving as a National repository; in fact there is already a growing number of external research being uploaded on OAR@UoM.

Through OAR@UoM, the UoM Library's goal is to bring together the Maltese research community by enhancing their awareness on OA; however, in order to guarantee that researchers submit material onto the IR in OA, the UoM has to issue a mandate that clearly outlines the responsibly involved with such an obligation. This will also provide researchers with an understanding of the very real benefits of OA and encourage them to become willingly involved in the necessary workflows involved in uploading material in OA. Research uploaded on OAR@UoM is also accessible through Google and Google Scholar. This may further impact the country as a whole due to the fact that research produced will be internationally visible and can result in foreign entities investing in local research.