



IR@L
20 Years

IR@L Executive Report
2023-24

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Introduction from the Chair

As Chair of the IReL Governance Committee and President of Maynooth University, the proud host of IReL, I am pleased to reflect on our achievements in 2023 and into 2024.

This year marks IReL's 20th anniversary. In June, we celebrated this milestone at the Royal Irish Academy with national policymakers, funders, research professionals, and librarians. We were honoured to have Dr Colm O'Reardon, Secretary General of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, join us as a speaker at the event, underscoring the importance of IReL's role in supporting research and higher education across Ireland.

Since its inception in 2004 as an ambitious initiative to create a national online research library, IReL has become a key driver of collaborative research and an invaluable resource for Irish higher education. Today, IReL serves 18 institutions, including the newly established technological universities, providing over 220,000 students and researchers access to extensive databases and open access agreements. In 2023, we recorded 24.8 million uses of IReL's licensed resources—the highest in our history. This level of engagement shows just how central IReL has become for researchers and students across disciplines, whatever their institution or career stage.

A major focus for IReL is supporting open access publishing. In 2023, we facilitated the publication of 2,533 articles through IReL-supported agreements, a 15.5% increase from 2022. Since 2020, we have enabled the publication of over 11,000 articles, enabling researchers to share their findings with a global audience. This commitment to open access has positioned Ireland among the top six nations for open access publishing, alongside countries such as Finland, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

Another significant milestone was the launch of the National Open Access Monitor in March 2024. Funded by the National Open Research Forum (NORF) and managed by IReL, this infrastructure tracks Irish peer-reviewed research outputs and monitors the growth of open access publications. The monitor has further established Ireland as a leader in open research practices and was recently recognised at a UNESCO conference as a global standard, reflecting our commitment to transparency and innovation.

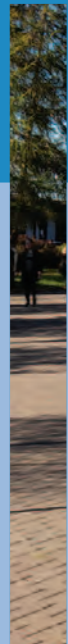
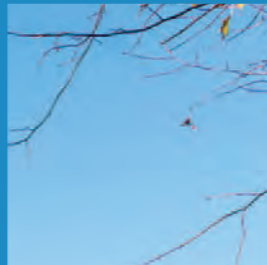
IReL's impact extends beyond providing access to resources. At the beginning of 2024, we took on the role of lead organisation for the Irish DataCite Consortium, helping to ensure that research outputs are openly available and discoverable. We also lead national efforts, supported by the Higher Education Authority, to integrate researcher identifiers, like ORCID, into institutional systems, enhancing the visibility and reliability of Irish research. These initiatives directly support Impact 2030, Ireland's research and innovation strategy, by promoting a more open and transparent research culture.

To build on these achievements, we introduced a new governance structure, establishing a Negotiations Group and an Advisory Council chaired by Dr Brendan Jennings of Technological University Dublin. These changes will support IReL's ongoing growth, allowing us to adapt to the evolving research landscape and explore sustainable funding models.

Over the past 20 years IReL has expanded in both scope and impact. Today it is a vital part of the national infrastructure for research, education and learning. I look forward to building on this success to make research conducted in Ireland more accessible and impactful for all.

Professor Eeva Leinonen, Chair, IReL Governing Committee





IReL is a great example of national level resource sharing and stakeholder collaboration delivering value for money at sectoral level. I am proud to see that 20 years on from its foundation IReL continues to deliver on its core mission of

promoting equity of access to quality research information resources across the higher education sector. With the technological universities joining as new members of IReL this mission is further reinforced.

IReL has also positioned Ireland as a global leader in open access, helping to realise the vision set out in Impact2030 by making Irish research outputs freely accessible to as many people as possible.

I would like to extend my congratulations on the 20th anniversary of IReL to all involved. ”

Patrick O'Donovan, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science



Director's Note

The IReL community has a lot to celebrate as we close out the 20th year of IReL. At our anniversary event in the Royal Irish Academy we heard some witty and heartfelt recollections, from a range of stakeholders including policy makers, researchers and librarians, of the challenges associated with gaining access to research before the widespread availability of scholarly information resources online.

Discussions also pointed to IReL's role in supporting equity of access to information in Ireland and beyond and the emergence of artificial intelligence as a new driver behind access.

The anniversary event was as much a celebration of the community of librarians who founded and have worked collaboratively to guide IReL over the past 20 years as it was a recognition of IReL's continued relevance 20 years after its foundation.

Collaboration very much remains the cornerstone of the next 20 years of IReL as we evolve to increase equity of access to information and to realise the NORF target of a path to equitable and inclusive open access by 2030. This is the rationale behind the establishment of the IReL Advisory Group. The Group membership is composed of a broad range of research stakeholders who will help shape the future development of IReL.

International collaboration is also increasingly important to IReL as we strive to adopt and contribute to the development of best practices and international principles in our operations.

Realising a transformation to open access requires global coordination. Whilst the number and percentage of Irish research articles that are open access has grown exponentially over recent years, the rate at which Irish researchers are publishing is growing also at almost double the global average of 3-4%. We therefore must work harder to continue to maintain the growth in the percentage of articles that are open access. Only by working to develop shared strategies and solutions at global level can we achieve this in a sustainable and equitable manner.

Another figure that continues to grow is the usage of IReL resources. At almost 25 million uses a year, the usage of IReL resources is at a record high. This reflects both a general shift towards users being more dependent on accessing information resources online and usage driven by our newest members. We are still in the very early stages of expanding access to resources to technological universities and institutes of technology. That the usage of resources by these institutions took off so quickly is a clear indication of the pent up demand that exists and that we hope to see further addressed in the coming years.

Susan Reilly, Director

Note on the Data

The data portions of this report refer to the calendar year of January – December 2023, as that was the complete dataset available at the time of writing. However, the report also discusses some news items of interest that have occurred in both 2023 and 2024.

20 Years of IReL: A Landmark Achievement

In June of 2024, IReL marked its 20th anniversary at a seminar in the Royal Irish Academy, hosted by its chairperson, Professor Eeva Leinonen. At this special event, IReL celebrated its role in advancing Irish research by providing access to electronic resources, supporting open access publishing, and fostering collaboration. The event highlighted the consortium's achievements and future, with a focus on advancing open access, AI's role in research, and the need for sustainable funding. In her opening address, Prof Leinonen spoke of Maynooth University's pride in hosting IReL since 2016, emphasising the collaborative spirit of the consortium IReL and its role in fostering equity and trust among researchers and institutions.

Foundation

IReL is founded as a nationally funded electronic research library serving the 7 national universities, initially to support researchers in Science, Technology and Medicine

Welcoming RSCI

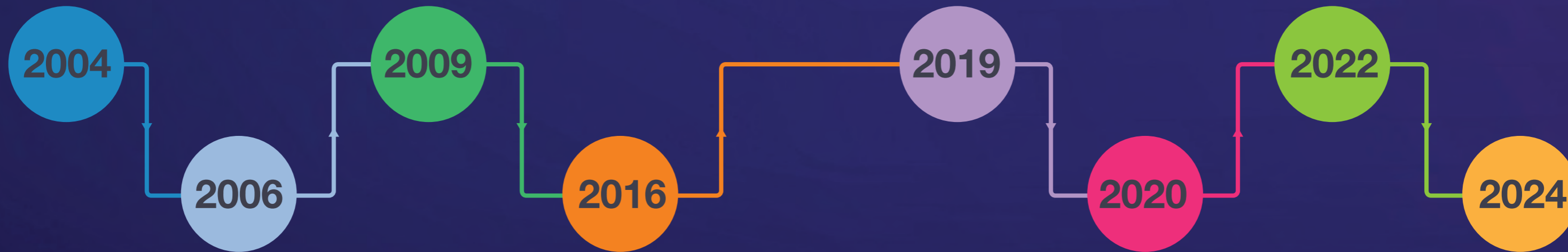
Additional funds were made available for the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and the institutes of technology

Welcoming TU Dublin

TU Dublin joined the consortium, making IReL resources available to all TU Dublin staff and students

Membership Expands

IReL membership grew from 10 to 17, with the addition of technological universities, institutes of technology and Mary Immaculate College



Expansion of Scope

Following the success of the initial project, IReL was expanded to support research in Humanities and Social Sciences

Move to MU

IReL began to be hosted by Maynooth University, having previously been hosted by HEAnet and UCD

First OA Agreements

IReL signed the first of its open access publishing agreements, paving the way to make Ireland a global leader in the provision of these services

A Landmark Year

IReL celebrated its 20 year anniversary, began as the Irish Datacite consortium lead, welcomed DIAS to the consortium and launched the National Open Access Monitor



From left to right: Dr Colm O'Reardon, DFHERIS Secretary General, Susan Reilly, Director of IReL, Prof Eeva Leinonen, Chairperson of IReL and MU President and Dr Orla Flynn, ATU President



Prof Eeva Leinonen, Chairperson of IReL and MU President makes her introductory address



Susan Reilly, Director of IReL speaks to delegates

“ I am delighted to serve on the first term of the IReL Negotiation Group. It's great to experience what it means to think in terms of the entire consortium, to have the strength in numbers behind you when pushing publishers for better deals, and ultimately to facilitate access behind paywalls, as well as pathways to open access publishing, for a large section of Irish Higher Education. ”

Dr. Christoph Schmidt-Supprian, Trinity College Library

Governance

In 2023 and 2024, IReL made significant changes to its governance structures, to better support the development and growth of the consortium.

Its Steering Group was replaced by a new Negotiations Group comprised of experts from IReL's member libraries with specialisms including e-resource licensing, open research and scholarly communication.

During IReL's 20th anniversary event, its new IReL Advisory Committee was announced. Chaired by Dr Brendan Jennings, Vice President for Research and Innovation at Technological University Dublin, the committee will guide IReL through future changes, ensuring it continues to meet the evolving needs of Irish research and education.



From left to right: Dr Brian Jackson, Head of Postgraduate Studies, SETU, Monica Crump, University Librarian, University of Galway, Dr Ciarán Seoighe, Deputy Director General, Science Foundation Ireland, Dr Brendan Jennings, Vice President of Research and Innovation, Technological University Dublin, Professor Gianpiero Cavalleri, Professor of Human Genetics at RCSI

“ IReL provides essential research infrastructure that is critical to the effectiveness and impact of Irish research. Its introduction 20 years ago provided researchers in Irish Universities with access to the outputs of research equal to that of researchers in the top universities globally, at a time when such publications were behind costly paywalls. Since that time IReL has evolved to include more higher education institutions and to provide researchers with the facility to publish their own research in a fully open access way immediately at the point of publication. Such open publishing helps to level the playing field for researchers across the world, as IReL did for Irish researchers, enabling all to collaborate on research to resolve the global challenges facing us. ”

I believe IReL now has a crucial role to play in pushing the transition towards a fully open research landscape, through national open publishing infrastructure or publishing deals that remove any remaining paywalls that restrict access to the outputs of publicly funded research. ”

Monica Crump, University Librarian, University of Galway

Expanding Membership

In 2023/24 IReL had **18 participating member institutions**, serving **220,000** of their students, staff and researchers across Ireland.

“DIAS were delighted when our membership application to join IReL was approved in 2023. The expansion of the consortium to include us, and others, helps to strengthen the entire research community across Ireland. DIAS is in a unique position on the Irish research landscape, being purely research focused, and having access to such a broad spectrum of international journals benefits each and every one of our researchers. We look forward to having access to even more journals in the near future, so as to benefit researchers across DIAS as they strive for discovery. With more knowledge, and more access to same, comes more discovery and more innovation. It is important that future funding for IReL is a key consideration for DFHERIS and funding agencies, as it truly benefits the Irish research landscape.”

Dr Eucharía Meehan, Registrar & CEO of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies

Technological Universities

Technological University Dublin became an IReL member in 2019 and now has access to all IReL resources. Following in their footsteps, the Institutes of Technology and other newly formed Technological Universities became IReL members in 2022. From January 2023 these institutions have been joining a growing number of IReL agreements, with supporting NTUTORR and HEA funding. Currently they take:

- Academic Search Complete
- Business Source Complete
- JSTOR Archive and Primary Source Collection
- Project MUSE Premium Collection
- Sage Research Methods Core
- Proquest's Social Science Premium Collection
- Science Online journal from AAAS
- Irish Newspapers Archive
- Springer Nature Computer Science ebook collection

In addition, they are members of a large number of transformative OA publishing agreements, giving them read access to publishers' journal collections and allowing them to publish open access at no extra charge:

- Cambridge University Press
- Oxford University Press
- Sage
- Springer Nature
- Taylor and Francis
- Wiley

Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies

IReL's membership continued to expand in 2024 to also welcome Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. DIAS currently subscribe to the following IReL agreements:

- AMS Journals
- APS Journals
- Irish Newspaper Archive
- OUP transformative agreement
- OUP reference works
- Project Muse Premium Collection
- RIA journals transformative agreement
- Royal Society journals transformative agreement
- Science Online journal from AAAS

Trust & Monitoring Infrastructure

“DataCite is incredibly pleased to be partnering with IReL in their role to lead the Irish community and as we continue on our journey to redefine the way we interact with research outputs and resources.”

Matt Buys, Executive Director of DataCite

DataCite

IReL announced in October 2023 that it would take over the role of Irish DataCite Consortium Lead Organisation from University College Dublin from 1st January 2024.

As national consortium lead for both DataCite (research object identifiers) and ORCID (researcher identifiers) IReL supports Action 4.4 of the National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2023 to 'Invest in Persistent Identifier infrastructure to enable consistent monitoring and improve interoperability'.



What is DataCite? - DataCite is a global initiative that helps ensure that research outputs are openly available and discoverable. This new service expands IReL's role in building trustworthy national research infrastructure. - <https://datacite.org/>

ORCID

IReL is the lead organisation for the Irish ORCID consortium. With the support of the HEA, it has facilitated the integration of ORCID identifiers into institutional systems.

Utilising these identifiers establishes links between researchers and their awarded grants, ultimately enhancing the reliability of the research infrastructure and improving the tracking of research outcomes.



What is ORCID? - ORCID is a free, unique, persistent identifier (PID) for individuals to use as they engage in research, scholarship, and innovation activities. - <https://orcid.org/>

National Open Access Monitor

In March 2024, The National Open Research Forum (NORF), IReL and OpenAIRE jointly launched the National Open Access Monitor¹, a cornerstone in Ireland’s shift towards a fully open access research ecosystem. The Monitor will support the shift towards transparency and accessibility of Irish research publications, and tracking Ireland’s goal of 100% of publicly funded research being open access by 2030.

Currently in its pilot phase, the Monitor provides data on over **500,000 publications**, detailing publications from 2007 to the present day. The following is represented in the Monitor:

1,232

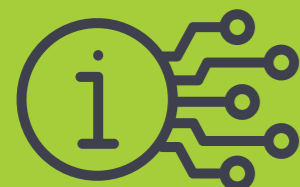
Research Producing Organisations (RPOs)

27

RPO dashboard managers

15

Research Funding Organisations (RFOs) dashboard managers have been registered and assigned.



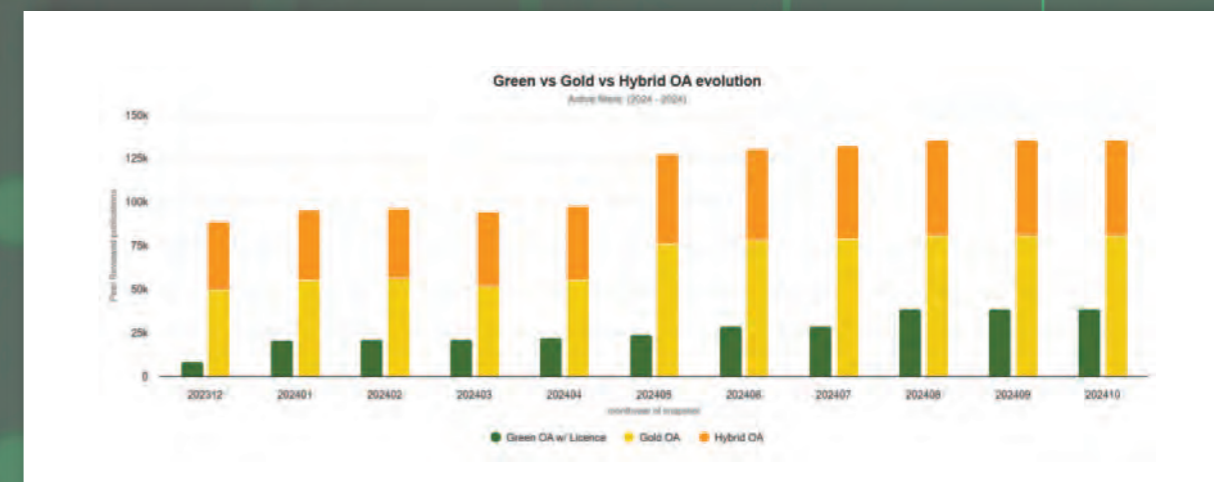
Since the Monitor was announced in late 2022, we have held **17 information and training sessions**, in addition to regular daily drop-in sessions to support participants.

The Monitor positions Ireland as a global leader in terms of implementing the UNESCO Open Science Recommendations.

Benefits of the Monitor

- Establish national-level visibility for institutional research.
- Compare OA performance against peer institutions.
- Ensure compliance with Open Access mandates.
- Uncover weak spots and insights to guide evidence-based decisions
- Ensure OA publications from their system are accurately reflected.
- Elevate repository records with precise validation and enrichment.
- Gain insights from detailed usage statistics.
- Simplify open access compliance, promoting effortless content dissemination.

¹ <https://oamonitor.ireland.openaire.eu/national>



“OpenAIRE is pleased to join IReL and NORF in the development of Ireland’s National Open Access Monitor, a project that directly reflects our foundational mission of advancing Open Science. We aim to provide a sustainable solution that caters to the distinct needs of all stakeholders, from researchers and institutions to policymakers and funders. Besides tracking progress, this effort is also about deciphering the complexities of open access, pinpointing potential areas for improvement, and empowering stakeholders to make informed, strategic decisions.”

Natalia Manola,
CEO of OpenAIRE

Funding

The Monitor was funded by the National Open Research Forum (NORF), as a collaborative project to implement priority actions in Ireland’s National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2030. By building national capacity and infrastructure for open research, these projects will support the visibility and impact of Irish research and help progress Ireland’s strategic goals for research and innovation under Impact 2030. The National Open Access Monitor is currently funded to continue until April 2025.

International Engagement

“As a member of the ICOLC task force, I am proud to emphasize the critical role that carefully reviewing and negotiating appropriate rights described AI license clauses plays in shaping the future of responsible AI use in research. This work is essential to ensuring that scientists and scholars are empowered to make responsible use of innovative AI tools that will boost their research potential. Consortia like IReL are uniquely positioned to lead these efforts, setting a precedent for others to follow and ensuring that AI technologies are leveraged in ways that benefit knowledge creation and society as a whole.”

Colleen Campbell, Strategic Advisor & Co-ordinator, Max Planck Digital Library

Throughout 2023-2024, IReL has worked in active partnership with international groups including OA2020, LIBER, OpenAPC, cOAlition S and International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) to further open research.

Artificial Intelligence in licensing

Since 2023, publishers have begun introducing new licensing terms prohibiting the use of their content with AI and, in particular, generative AI tools such as ChatGPT. We are concerned that these terms could have a chilling effect on research, preventing researchers from gaining new insights in text and data mining of literature. We are equally concerned that such terms are unenforceable as AI tools are increasingly part of the day-to-day tools students and staff use in their work.

IReL is engaging with peer consortia internationally on emerging best practice in such licensing terms, which strike a balance between copyright holders' rights, while protecting researchers', staff and students' in member institutions rights to benefit from AI: in enabling groundbreaking research, in increasing their productivity and in discovering novel applications for AI.

In May 2024 the IReL Governance Committee endorsed the ICOLC Statement on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Licensing*, along with research libraries and licensing consortia worldwide.

The Statement was developed in response to concerns that new license language by publishers and vendors defining rights and restrictions related to AI undermines both the rights of users and digital transformation in research institutions.

As artificial intelligence – in particular, generative AI and large language models – has developed rapidly since the release of ChatGPT to the public in late 2022, electronic resource vendors have begun to present libraries and consortia with new license language defining rights and restrictions related to AI. As libraries and vendors navigate the rapidly changing technological and legal landscape of AI, ICOLC supports its member consortia in their efforts to ensure library user rights are maintained in alignment with organizational interests and values. ICOLC recognizes that such rights are imperative for supporting:

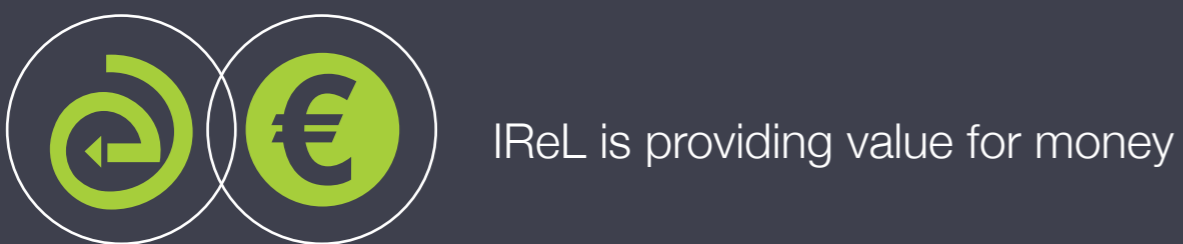
- Digital transformation in research
- Equitable access to information
- The open access transition in scholarly communication

* <https://icolc.net/statements/icolc-statement-ai-licensing>

Collections Review

Earlier this year, IReL began its first collections review in some time, focusing on the full year of 2022 as it was at the time the last data-complete year, and dealt with the members funded by IReL's core grants in 2022.

We used CPU (cost per use) and PAR fee (also sometimes referred to as investment per article) metrics for evaluation of our resources - This showed that the investment is balanced across disciplines, however there may be scope for further investment in some disciplines, such as applied sciences.



The investment is balanced across disciplines



But more investment is needed to achieve 100% Open Access.

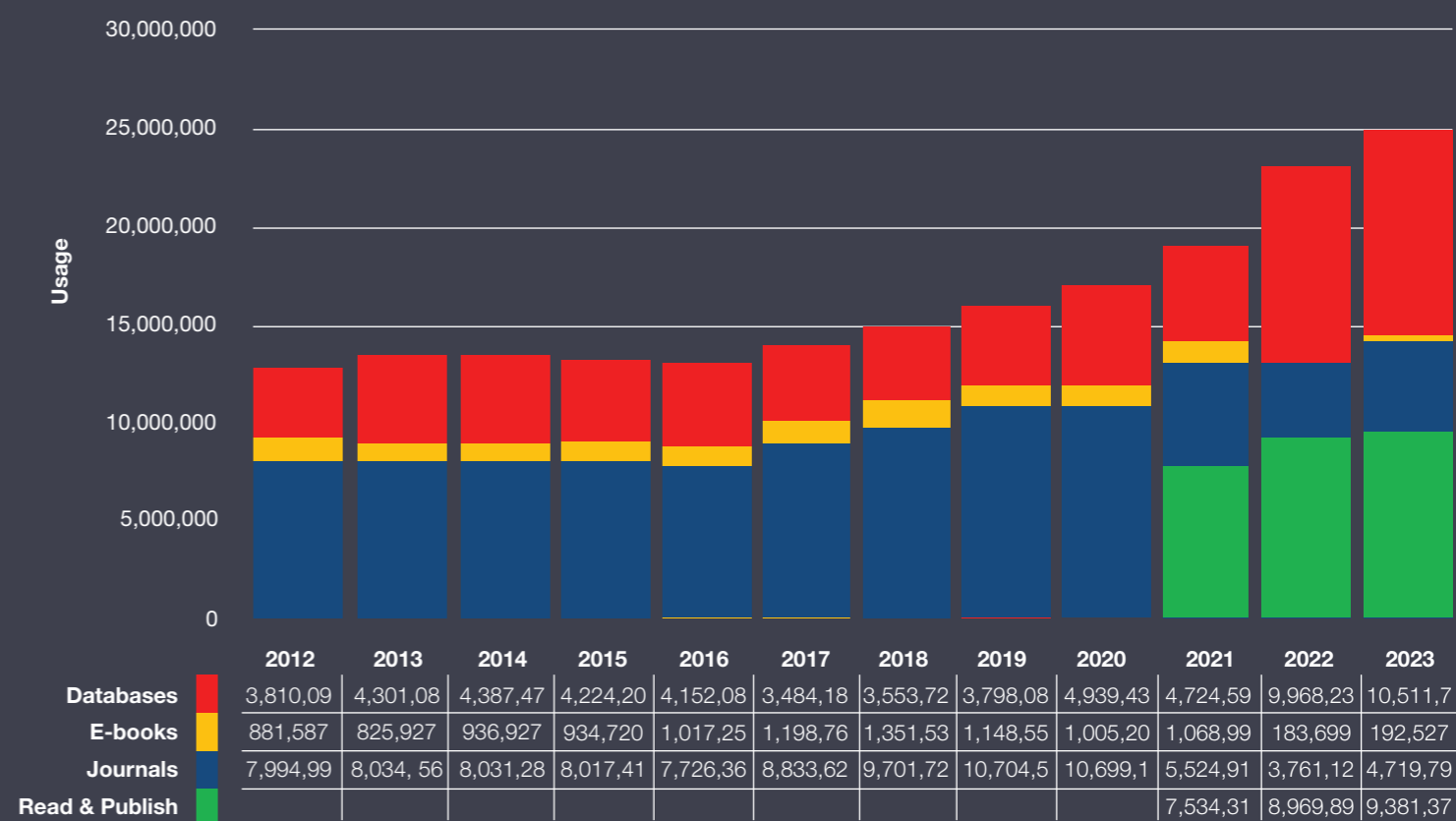
Usage



24.8 million

We recorded **24.8 million** uses of IReL's licensed resources in 2023, across **18 institutions** serving over 220,000 students. This is the highest level of annual recorded usage in IReL's history.

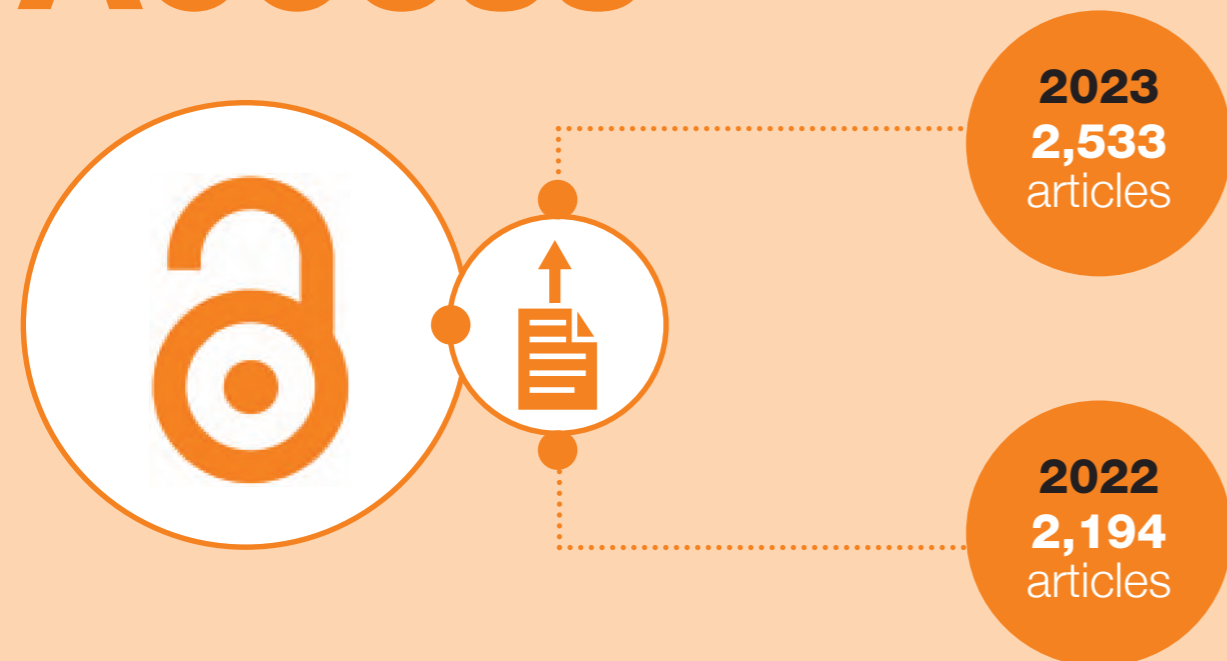
Usage year-by-year, with coloured product category proportions.



The graph above shows the usage year-by-year from 2012 to 2023, with the different product category proportions shown as coloured parts of the whole. Recently, some products have been re-categorised, applied from the 2022 data onwards in this report; this is the main reason for the apparent decrease in e-books usage. Part of the overall increase in usage can be explained by new members (MIC, TUs and IOTs) joining in 2022 and 2023.

Open Access

2,533 articles were published OA in 2023 as part of IReL-supported OA agreements, a 16% increase from the **2,194 articles** in 2022.



An additional **1,069 articles** were made OA through the ScienceDirect agreement, which is led by Irish HEI librarians, with support from IReL.



93% of eligible authors in 2023 opted in to avail of IReL support for OA.

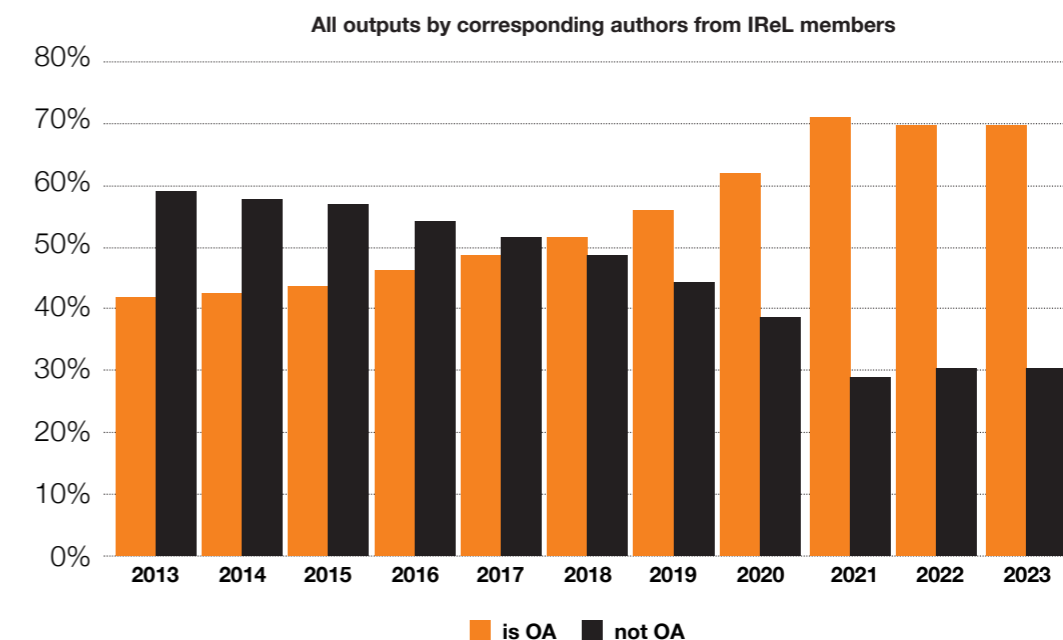
Not all articles were made OA for several reasons, such as limited OA quotas in certain agreements running out, or authors choosing not to make their article OA.

Overall we see IReL supported OA agreements continuing to be a primary driver of the NORF Plan's² target of 100% open access to Irish research publications by 2030. Measured by publications from corresponding authors affiliated with IReL member institutions, we have reached about 70% OA per year, although this growth has slowed in recent years.

² <https://norf.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/National-Action-Plan-for-Open-Research-webversion.pdf>

IReL has pledged to support the realisation the NORF Action Plan's goal, primarily the target of implementing a sustainable and inclusive course to achieving 100% OA by 2030. This is reflected in our priorities in the negotiation of future agreements and in our commitment to ensuring that transformative agreements (which we consider to be a transitional model) are ultimately phased out in favour of more sustainable OA business models. We articulated this position in our 2023 statement *Towards transparent, equitable and open access to scholarly publications: IReL's approach to the negotiation of transformative agreements*.³

Percentage split of OA versus closed publications by IReL member affiliated corresponding authors, 2013 - 2023.
Source: OpenAlex.



Although the number of IReL-funded OA articles has increased year-on-year, there has been a slight drop in the overall percentage of OA in 2023 because of fluctuations with other models of OA (Green, or Gold outside of IReL deals)

Leading on Best Practice

To date, IReL has contributed metadata for 6,736 articles to OpenAPC's Transformative Agreements project⁴. OpenAPC is an initiative that provides open access datasets with metadata on articles published OA through TAs and APCs paid in-the-wild.

CCC, the leading provider of Open Access (OA) workflow solutions, has named IReL as directly contributing to their OA workflow for Rightslink⁵, the scholarly communications workflow tool for the OA community. Many of IReL's standardised fields were added to their new reporting format from June 2023 – making IReL a world leader in scholarly communications workflow solutions.

³ <https://irel.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/IReL-statement-on-TAs-2023.pdf>

⁴ <https://treemaps.openapc.net/apcdata/transformative-agreements/#institution/country=IRL>

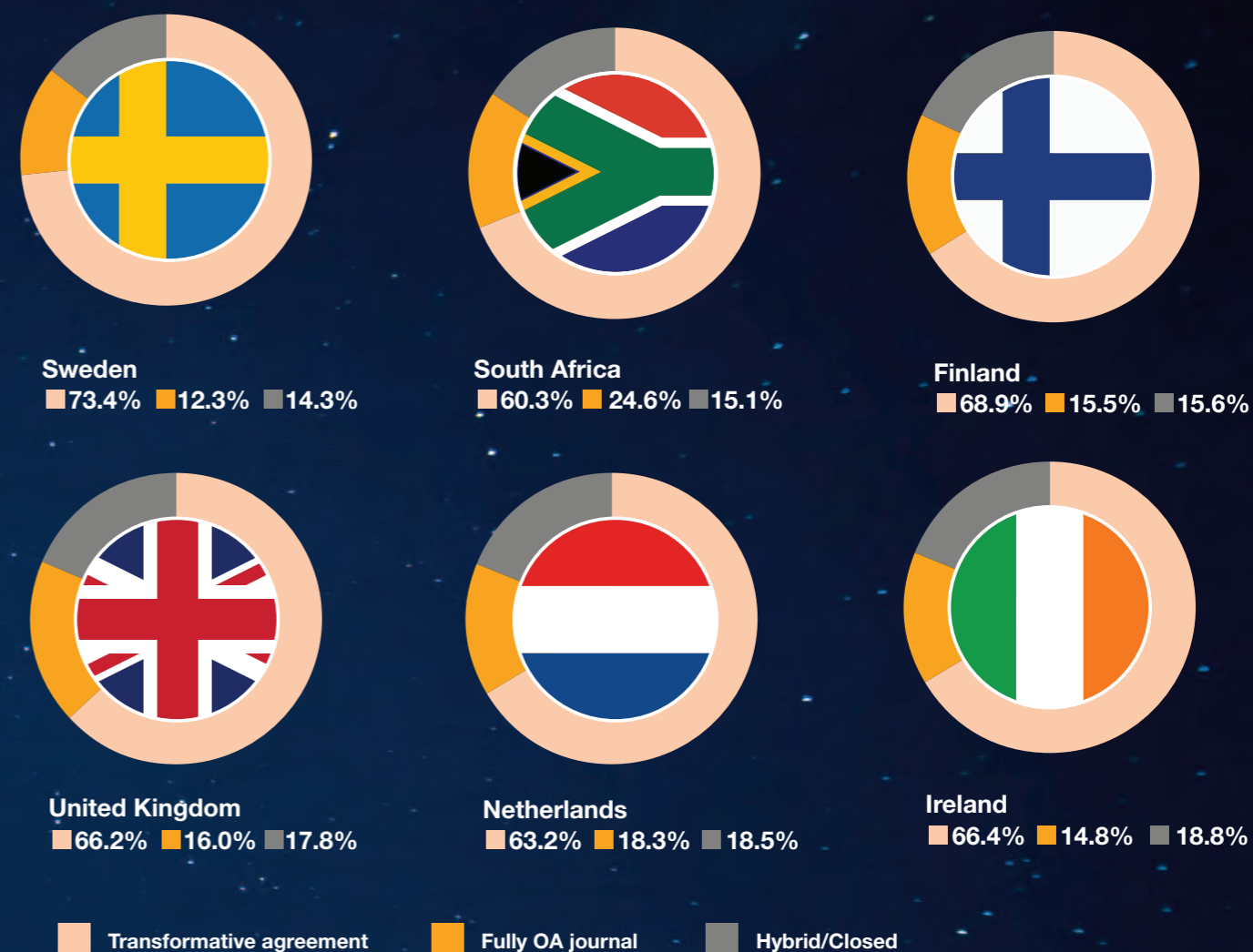
⁵ <https://www.copyright.com/media-press-releases/coc-announces-enhancement-to-consortia-processing-of-open-access-agreements-in-its-innovative-rightslink-for-scientific-communications-workflow-solution/>

International Benchmarking



Ireland continues to be a global leader in publishing its research open access, largely driven by IReL's negotiation and support for transformative agreements at scale. The **ESAC Marketwatch*** website places Ireland sixth among 61 benchmarked countries in OA publishing, by percentage of articles eligible to be published OA as part of a transformative agreement.

*<https://esac-initiative.org/market-watch/>



ESAC is an open community of information professionals dedicated to putting the vision of Open Access to research into practice

About IReL

Governance Committee

Prof. Eeva Leinonen, Maynooth University, (Chair)
 Caitríona Ryan, Higher Education Authority
 Anna Lundén, National Library of Sweden
 Susan Reilly, IReL
 Jack Hyland, IReL, (GC Secretary)
 Sharon Bailey, University of Galway
 Coral Black, University College Cork
 Dr Liam Brown, Technological University of the Shannon
 Allison Kavanagh, Technological University Dublin
 Cathal McCauley, Maynooth University
 Prof. Rachel Msetfi, Maynooth University
 Dr. Johanna Archbold, Atlantic Technological University

Advisory Committee

Dr. Brendan Jennings, Technological University Dublin (Chair)
 Monica Crump, University of Galway (Vice-chair)
 Peter Brown, Irish Research Council
 Arlene Healy, University College Dublin
 Ashling Hayes, University of Limerick
 Prof. Gianpiero Cavalleri, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
 Dr. Geraldine Canny, South East Technological University
 Jean Ricken, Munster Technological University
 Susan Reilly, IReL (ex officio)
 Dr. Michelle Doran, National Open Research Forum (ex officio)

Negotiations group members

Negotiations Group
 Susan Reilly, IReL, (Chair)
 Jack Hyland, IReL
 Aaron Binchy, IReL, (Secretary)
 Amanda Halpin, Dublin City University
 Michaela Hollywood, Maynooth University
 Karen McCormack, Munster Technological University
 Dr. Christoph Schmidt-Supprian, Trinity College Dublin
 Hardy Schwamm, University College Cork
 Kathryn Smith, Royal College of Surgeons Ireland
 Maura Stephens, Atlantic Technological University

Team Members

Susan Reilly, (Director)
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 Aidan Mullen, (Financial Controller)
 Aaron Binchy, (Contract Manager)
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