

History never repeats...?

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My first exposure to the New Zealand Science Review (NZSR) came relatively early in my post-doctoral career when a colleague sent me a manuscript entitled ‘*Trapped in the postdoctoral void: Lack of postdoctoral opportunities in New Zealand forces emerging researchers to exit science or seek employment overseas*’ (Massaro et al., 2012). Here was an article, in a journal I’d never heard of, that felt as if it had been pulled directly from my brain. The issues, worries and solutions therein were the very things that my colleagues and I would incessantly kick around as we bemoaned the lack of a pathway from our fixed-term positions into stable science jobs.

History never repeats, I tell myself before I go to sleep...

Split Enz – History Never Repeats (1981)

Had I taken the initiative at the time and done some more digging perhaps I would have found the thematically linked ‘*Contract academic staff career development: An oxymoron?*’ (Bennet et al., 2005) from 7 years prior — or perhaps I would not have. While a digital copy of this issue existed, somewhere, it was not necessarily easily accessible online. No doubt I could have walked across Grafton Bridge and down Symonds St to hunt through Te Tumu Herenga – the University of Auckland Library; but flipping through back issues of NZSR was an unlikely use of my time.

Fast forward a number of years and I found myself joining the NZAS as a group of people who appeared to be having similar thoughts about the long-term stability of our research, science and innovation sector. At this point I was around 8 years into my ‘precarious’ career and my general feeling was that long-term job prospects in Aotearoa were fairly poor, unless I was willing to continue on fixed-term contract after fixed-term contract. From joining NZAS, to putting my hand up to join the Council and from there the NZSR subcommittee was a fairly quick journey. The main draw-card to the latter was admittedly a long-standing admiration of DOIs (Digital Object Identifiers), but working with the team I have discovered deeper meaning.

Problems that exist in science and science policy have a tendency to hang around. As I work through the process of uploading back issues (see the ever-expanding archive here)

I often spot article titles and think “*that could be written today!*”. The contents of these issues provide an essential resource for us today, as well as our future colleagues – telling us what has been tried, knowing who tried it and where it was tried. There is also an element of camaraderie seeing names of note speaking out on issues that affect you, indeed, those very authors may now be senior people in your organisation.

Issues recently added to the archive consider topics like Women in Science (NZSR, 71 (3), 2014), Mātauranga Māori (NZSR, 76 (4), 2019; NZSR, 76 (1-2), 2020), the intersection of science and policy (NZSR, 72 (3), 2015), managerialism in science (Gill, 2021), research sector reform (Baisden, 2020) and even the history of the NZAS (Gregory, 2013*a,b*, 2014, 2016) — all this feels relevant today! There is countless wisdom to be found in the NZSR through decades, yet in the recent past only a fraction of it was readily accessible online and none of it was well-indexed and accessible *via* an immutable identifier (back to those DOIs). As I write we have over a decade of NZSR uploaded with each article assigned a DOI. We have issues dating back to 2003 ready and awaiting addition to the archive - but this represents less than 25% of NZSR history.

We are fortunate that through a collaboration between the HathiTrust and the University of California there is a significant digital archive of back issues, although it is incomplete (Editors, 2013) and outside our control. Hard copies of NZSR are still accessible in many of our University and CRI libraries, diligently collected by our trusty librarians. This means that the dream of gathering our own high-quality digital copies of the entire NZSR back catalogue and archiving them in an open and searchable format is possible, although it is not an insignificant undertaking.

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

George Santayana – The Life of Reason (1905)

Over the last two years many of us have put significant time and effort into Te Ara Paerangi – Future Pathways as we hope to reform and reimagine our research sector. The NZAS’s submission (NZAS, 2022) in particular leaned on scholarship previously presented within the pages of NZSR,

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yet what allowed us to access this content was the memories of our colleagues. Without a search function you can only seek out what you know (or expect) to be there. While the mind is a brilliant thing, it ultimately must prove to be an unreliable index – once its synapses are silent it remembers no more. The themes seen in Bennet et al. (2005) and Massaro et al. (2012) will be familiar to many, and were repeated in a number of Te Ara Paerangi – Future Pathways submissions, the cycle continues. In order to safeguard our history as we build a new future, we would be best served to store and index our collective wisdom where it is readily found and hard to forget.

I hope reading this prompts you to visit the [NZSR archive](#) and browse through the content. Who knows... maybe you'll unearth something relevant to you.

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