

Letters

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I see the article in eLucidate (<http://www.ukeig.org.uk/members/access/elucidate/index.html>) cites the Forbes and Gibbons (2005) description of an IR as “an electronic system that captures, preserves, and provides access to the digital work products of a community” ... which is pretty much how I would have described one.

Thus, I was intrigued by the following correspondence (today) on the JISC-REPOSITORIES list which suggested that one of these uses is not valid. The email response to the initial question is from Steven Harnad:

I should be grateful if anyone can provide me some evidence to back the following statement:

"Concern of longevity has contributed to the lack of active engagement from many researchers [with institutional repositories]. Guarantee of long-term preservation helps enhance a repository's trustworthiness by giving authors confidence in the future accessibility and more incentives to deposit content"

I guess longevity here also applies to the financial sustainability of the repository itself as a business operation, in addition to its content.

The statement is (1) not based on evidence at all, but pure speculation and (2) speculation not on the part of the content-providers (i.e., the authors who are presently only spontaneously self-archiving their published articles at about the 15% level) but on the part of others, whose a priori concept of an institutional repository is that it is for long-term preservation (rather than for immediate access-provision and impact maximisation) [...]

But it would be absolutely absurd of their employers and funders to mandate self-archiving for the sake of long-term preservation!

Preservation of what, and why? Articles are published by journals. The preservation of the published version is the responsibility of the journals that publish it, the libraries that subscribe/license it, and the deposit libraries that archive it. None of that is the responsibility of the author or his institution, and never has been.

So, according to Harnad, IRs are solely for immediate access provision, and anything else would be absurd.

Can I ask whether this is the understanding which everyone else has?

I wonder how many institutions who own IRs see their role in this way – because logic might suggest that articles should be tossed out after their normal life span (whatever that might be), thereby saving on sustainable storage, administration and all those other archive nightmares.

Chris Armstrong