Rewards awit the far-cited

Putting research online could lift a university from a two-star ranking to a five, writes Brendan O'Keefe

Australia's research impact could be increased to a level that would otherwise require an extra $425 million a year in funding if academics simply posted their papers on a personal or university website page rather than shelving them in a library or publishing them only in a little-read journal.

Self-archiving, as proposed by Canadian academic Steven Harland, could bring academics and students greater exposure and more citations than through traditional publication. Harland says the increase in impact of published research could elevate a country's research ability to the level of countries with better research quality frameworks.

"It's transparently obvious that [publications, websites, and so on] should be digital, online and freely accessible to everybody," Harland, who was the keynote speaker at a recent conference run by the Australian Digital Thesis Program at the University of NSW. "You have to supply your published version with a home-brewed version that you put in your own institutional repository... your own refereed final draft for those who can't afford the publisher's value-added version." Harland is moderating the American Scientific Open Access Forum and a professor of computer science at the University of Southampton and the University of Quebec in Montreal.

He says the publish-or-perish mandate has to be taken further. Only Southampton, the Swiss physics research laboratory CERN and the Queensland University of Technology have made policy that staff and students self-archive.

Smaller universities stand to gain more by self-archiving. Harland says even the richest university, Harvard, can afford to subscribe to only a small fraction of the 24,000 peer-reviewed journals in the world, which carry about 2.5 million articles per year.

Smaller universities can afford even fewer subscriptions, so most published academic work remains unused by most of the author's peers.

"From the point of view of the author, the fact that so few potential users can't access his or her work is really a nuisance," Harland says. "We're not doing anything the way it is now."

"The only way you can provide access to your work's potential impact is by self-archiving. If you don't do it, your work is not going to be accessed." Harland says.

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