

Universities' alternative to Google launched

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An internet search engine rivalling the multimillion pound Google is to be launched at the end of January by The University of Manchester's national data centre Mimas.

The free service will add thousands of documents to the 'Intute' service which already allows academics, teachers, researchers and students to search for information relating specifically to their subject area.

The launch follows high profile criticism by a senior academic at Brighton University, who argued that students need to be taught to challenge the facts taken from Google or Wikipedia.

At the end of January, researchers will be able to automatically access papers from research databases within universities and other institutions.

The £1.5 million per year collaboration between seven UK Universities and partners - enlists a team of full-time specialists who are scouring the internet.

They are backed by an army of PhD students and a range of organisations - including the massive Wellcome Trust- who have added their own information to the Intute database.

Intute also provides free Internet tutorials in a 'Virtual Training Suite' to help students learn how to get the best from the Web - used by millions of people across the world.

It is funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee and The Arts and Humanities Research Council.

According to Executive Director Caroline Williams, Intute is more discriminating than Google which uses robots to automatically index web pages.

She said: "Google isn't discriminating about the material it chooses - and with no systematic quality control processes it is very difficult for people to explore and discover trusted information.

"But automation combined with human value judgements, can be more responsive and dynamic in meeting the needs of higher and further education.

"Intute's new content will be harvested automatically using purposely designed software from trustworthy sources, primarily UK university research databases and repositories.

"Together with its existing services, the material provides more accurate and sensitive subject retrieval so it is a safety net for those students who haven't acquired the skills of evaluation.

"Intute makes the judgement for them."

She added: "This chimes with calls for open access across the UK which lobbys for the right of researchers to receive information easily, quickly and free of charge.

"So this database is really a showcase of what the UK academic community has achieved.

"Millions of people have been using our Virtual Training Suite since

1998 when we created one of the first ever Web-based tutorials.

"It really is the envy of the international academic community and you can access it by visiting www.intute.ac.uk ."

Source: University of Manchester

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