Technology for employability: HE case studies
University of London: An ‘Enhance your Careers and Employability Skills’ MOOC

Summary

In 2014, the Careers Group at the University of London developed the world’s first careers and employability skills MOOC on behalf of the University of London International Programmes. It was delivered via the Coursera platform and attracted 89,000 students from 208 countries across the world.

Organisation

University of London: International Programmes and The Careers Group

In 1858, the University of London established the University of London International Programmes to give students around the world access to top British education. This makes the University of London International Programmes the world’s oldest provider of distance and flexible learning.

Founded in 1909, The Careers Group, University of London is a consortium that delivers career development and associated services to education institutions and corporate clients across Europe. These services include producing a range of technology-supported employability services and products. They range from employability webinars, accessed by students whenever and wherever they like, to Careers Tagged, an extensive online careers information library hosted by The Careers Group.
Making it happen

The University of London Careers Group developed the MOOC on behalf of the University of London International Programmes, aiming to support students in effective decisions about their future career and controlling their professional development through honing their critical thinking and employability skills. The MOOC is therefore suitable for anyone undertaking some form of study, regardless of academic discipline, interests or employment background. Six key universal themes were identified:

» Self-awareness (What do you want?)
» Skills awareness (What can you offer?)
» Career readiness (Are you ready to find success?)
» Articulating your experiences (How do you express yourself?)
» Making a good impression in person (What impact do you make?)
» Networking online and in person (How do you build fruitful relationships?)

The six-week course delivered in English was essentially asynchronous, consisting of:

» self-reflective exercises
» questionnaires (e.g. based on three-five specific questions for each theme)
» active reading tasks
» short segmented videos of lecturer-led delivery
» accompanied by slides, practical assignments (e.g.
» informational interviewing)
» short segmented videos of related activities (e.g. mock
» interviews) to provide feedback on

Overall, there are 60 videos of length ranging from 30 seconds to 20 minutes, utilising 14 presenters and six employers.

The course provides regular opportunities for students to reflect on each theme as well as activities to complete and opportunities to contribute. Students were encouraged to give feedback on each other’s reflections either
via the peer assessment tool or via the forums. Self-evaluation questionnaires help students to monitor their progress. Technical support for students was provided through Coursera and students were expected to allocate three-six hours per week in participation.

The Careers Group team monitored and moderated the different forums which became highly active, typically attracting 10-12,000 posts, though the system became difficult to navigate with such large numbers of postings. The moderators helped to overcome this by, for example, creating new discussion threads that summarised existing long discussion threads. The moderators were also pro-active in seeding questions in the forums.

The forums generated a rich resource of ideas and links and benefitted from the international spread of the participants: for example, students would provide ideas, support and opportunities for other students to take advantage of in different countries. Many discussions focused on different cultural and working practices across the world and how these impact on employability, careers and international working.

**Technology**

The MOOC is based on the bespoke Coursera technology platform. As such it provides a range of features such as video lectures, interactive quizzes, peer graded assessments and mechanisms to connect with instructors and other students, such as via forums.

**Impact**

The course was a great success and attracted 89,000 regularly participating students from 208 countries across the world with an age range from 15 – 85 and 44% female, including both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The majority of participants were not in full or part-time education and the majority were full-time employed. As with any MOOC, regardless of subject, the initial registration (126,000) was greater than the number of actively participating students on the course, although this ‘conversion’ rate was higher than is normally experienced on many other MOOCs. 96% of the participants found the course experience ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ (41% Excellent, 40% Very Good, 15% Good). Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of participants reported that their confidence had increased in each aspect of their career development. Limited evaluation with employers produced positive feedback.
Sustainability

Following the 2014 MOOC, the course has been successfully run again in a very similar format from June-July 2015 with a smaller cohort of 82,000 registrations with 45,000 active students. Once again participants came from over 200 countries across the world. The evaluation survey for this iteration of the course is still being collected but anecdotal participant feedback has yet again been very positive. Future possibilities include offering the course on an on-demand basis (i.e. available to start at any time) which may also include a range of enhancements such as:

» Introducing synchronous features e.g. via Google Hangouts
» Remodelling materials for a Moodle VLE
» Possible adoption of e-portfolios
» Development of a sophisticated questionnaire to provide a diagnostics tool to help students to navigate the course in an individual way and potentially provide common pathway options e.g. students wanting to improve their CV
» Supporting University of London programme teams in integrating the course into their curricula
» Systems to support student progress monitoring

Materials from the course have already been successfully migrated to a University of London Moodle VLE. These will be used as a basis for developing an internal Small Private Online Course (SPOC) at one of the University of London Colleges.

Lessons Learnt

A number of lessons have been learnt:

» Some of the most valuable input to such a course can come from the participants, particularly in an international context. This provides a rich source of data on which to build on in future MOOCs
» There is a global appetite for career learning, networking and peer support, reflecting a survey that showed 41% found their last job via networking
» The platform used (Coursera) was not ideally suited for grading soft topics such as ‘aspiration’ due to the constraints of its peer assessment mechanism
The MOOC provided the opportunity to survey a large number of global participants: e.g. highlighting that leadership is the skill that they are least confident about demonstrating.

Not all students provided peer feedback, therefore mechanisms need to be developed to encourage this.

The forums became difficult to navigate with large numbers of postings and this can be overcome, to an extent, by moderators starting new discussion threads which summarise prior ones.

There is a possibility that some students may register mistakenly presuming that individual guidance will be provided. This may lead to them disengaging from the material if that is not possible due to the sheer size of the cohort.

Find out more

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