

Lifelong learning and the EHEA agenda Contribution of the European MOOC Consortium

The European MOOC Consortium

MOOCs are freely accessible courses that meet the needs of today's learners for an increasingly complex world. They have become a new area of provision in universities, mainly in the US and Europe. In 2017, the main European MOOC platforms created the European MOOC Consortium, consisting of Futurelearn (the Open University), France Université Numérique (FUN, Ministry of Higher Education), Miríadax (Telefonica Educacion Digital), EduOpen (Consortium of the University of Foggia with 15 other Italian universities) together with the OpenupEd portal (EADTU) established the European MOOC Consortium (EMC¹) in order to collaborate and to optimise services. These platforms support universities in developing and delivering MOOCs. They represent five networks of universities with more than 280 universities together, reaching out to already 15 million students².

MOOCs

EMC platforms and universities recognise that MOOCs are here to stay and that they are becoming an increasingly important area of provision in the higher education system. MOOCs contribute to the digital innovation in higher education. More importantly, they offer a response to the widespread challenge of meeting the future needs of employers and employees for smaller, flexible and regular knowledge and skills development to cope with a fast changing world.

MOOCs contribute to the core mission of universities by:

- sharing education with all citizens by open accessibility in a context of lifelong learning (**open education**),
- transferring and valorising innovative knowledge to enterprises, offering modern ways for students to acquire and evidence skills to employers (**continuing education, CPD**)
- integrating MOOCs as an enriching learning experience in blended degree education (**bachelor, master and postgraduate programs**)

MOOCs also strengthen the participation in knowledge created at other universities as part of virtual and physical **mobility schemes**. Technical universities have already developed such a network, and other universities will follow as virtual mobility becomes increasingly important for all students, next to physical mobility.

In the future, MOOCs will not only be taken up by individual learners, but they will also target groups of learners as part of degree courses or in continuous education/CPD offerings of universities and other organizations (professional bodies, professional knowledge networks, companies, employment services): as a single course, as a preparation course or as module in a course package.

¹ About the European MOOCs Consortium, est in Oct. 2017, see: <https://eadtu.eu/home/policy-areas/open-education-and-moocs/services/416-the-european-mooc-consortium>

² Investments in and the uptake of MOOCs are increasing significantly worldwide. Class Central reported that in 2016, 58 million students registered to over 6,850 courses developed by over 700 universities. In the past three months alone, more than 200 universities have announced 560 such free online courses. These figures don't include all European initiatives. A number of European universities are on US platforms too, mainly on edX.

The assessment and recognition of MOOCs is still a challenge, although progress is made. Providers experiment with badges, micro-credentials and micro-masters. EMC is looking for comparability and a common recognition framework for MOOC awards.

All this connects with the Opening Up Education Policy and the Modernisation Agenda of the European Commission³. Hence, MOOCs have an increasing impact on higher education systems.⁴

Proposal

MOOCs and their role in open education and innovation in higher education should be stimulated and activated by national governments as part of the development of EHEA in order to accelerate strategic efforts and developments in lifelong learning in all European countries.

Next to degree education (bachelor-master) and continuous education programmes, open education and MOOCs should be considered as a part of the European Higher Education Area.

A working group should be created to align and engage governments and universities in lifelong learning policies, embracing continuous education and MOOCs to meet the needs of the European labour market and of society at large.

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³ See: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-859_en.htm

⁴ The changing pedagogical landscape. Retrieved from <http://www.changingpedagogicallandscapes.eu/publications/>