Who will accredit MOOC learning? A survey of Work based learning departments in English and Welsh universities

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“..while in the first instance MOOCs will simply be for voluntary leisure learning, there is clearly the potential for these courses to be accredited and count towards degree programmes. A candidate who successfully completes a MOOC could pay a small fee in order to take an assessment and gain credit that counts towards a formal qualification. The intention would be that students could take a series of credits at very low cost before transferring to a full-cost course to ‘top up’ their qualification. This could be a very powerful way of delivering part-time distance learning at no extra cost to the state. The accreditation could either be done by the HEI that provided the MOOC, or it could be overseen by the Open University, since it is hosting the FutureLearn platform and has extensive experience in credit-based distance learning….We recommend that English HEIs should embrace the potential of new technologies by recognising credit from low-cost online courses so that they can count towards degree programmes. To make a start down this road we recommend that the Open University should accredit MOOCs provided via the FutureLearn platform so that they can count towards degree programmes offered by the OU itself and its partner institutions”

We are not involved in creating MOOC content but at CWRS we are used to converting Non-formal and Informal learning into academic credit (APEL).

A MOOC certificate is evidence of Non-formal learning.

We do not think many MOOC certificates are a good basis for APL/RPL claims: many of them are them have content unsuited for WBL, it is difficult to establish level and for the many there is little content so it is difficult to convert into blocks of 20 credits. Most MOOCs are ‘tasters’ ie thinly disguised marketing devices.

In any case very few students appear to have completed MOOC courses.
The survey

- We wondered if other universities are using MOOC certificates as the basis for APEL? RPEL claims: 41 universities contacted who appear to be engaged in WBL: 26 responded.

- Includes most of the major providers but not all

- Three types of question: nature of WBL provision, use of online learning materials and APL/RPL procedures

- There has been no survey of APL/RPL in England since 2000 and no survey of WBL departments
What is Work based learning? (n=26)

- Work placements for full time students
- Work based learning modules within a defined curriculum mostly comprised of subject discipline modules within a university created curriculum
- Curriculum based around subject discipline modules negotiated with an employer
- Negotiable (with students/employers) curriculum based upon work based learning modules
- Negotiable (with students/employers) curriculum including work based and subject discipline modules
How many students are engaged in WBL? (n=25)
How many FTEs in WBL (estimated)? (n=25)
Estimated proportion of WBL students who are distance learners (n=25)
Who produces online learning materials? (n=26)

- Online materials produced by yourself/colleagues: 6
- Online materials produced by the university: 2
- Online materials produced by yourself/colleagues and the university: 18
Type of content created (n=26)

- Created a programme VLE
- Created content for a programme VLE
- Created content for a subject discipline module
- Created content for a work based (experiential learning) module
- Other
Responsibility for inducting students into the use of online materials (n=26)
Internal online resources students are directed to (n=26)
External online resources students are directed to (n=24)
Attitudes towards Wikipedia (n=25)

![Bar chart showing attitudes towards Wikipedia]

- Strongly discourage: 6
- Discourage: 5
- Neither encourage or discourage: 9
- Encourage: 1
- Strongly encourage: 0
Use of free online books (n=14)
Use of freely available videos (n=17)
Use of other non-MOOC academic sources (n=18)
Use of MOOCs (n=20)
APL/RPL in WBL Departments: currency of allowable APCL/RPCL (n=24)
Methods for giving currency to outdated APCL/RPCL (n=24)

- We do not allow any claims out of time
- Give currency by updating knowledge
- Give currency through application of knowledge
- Assessment of experiential knowledge
- Assessment via line manager appraisal
The uses of APL/RPL (n=22)
Estimated number of students admitted to WBL programmes on the basis of APL/ RPL claims (n=15)
Evidence of APL/RPL as the basis for admission purposes (n=19)
Assessment methods of APL/RPL claims for credit (n=19)
Estimated number of students making APL claims for credit (n=24)
Trojan horse v Procrustean approaches to curriculum (n=22)

Programme can adapt to APL/RPL

APL/RPL must adapt to the programme
Permitted APL/RPL as part of an award (n=22)
APCL/RPCL or APEL/RPEL? (n=21)
APEL/RPEL: specific or generic credit? (n=18)
Acceptable sources of non-formal learning for APEL/RPEL claims (n=20)
Acceptability of a certificate obtained via automated assessment as the basis for an APEL/RPEL claim (n=19)
Acceptability of a online source of learning as the basis for a APEL/RPEL claim (n=20)
Acceptability of a Non-formal qualification in a foreign language as the basis for a APRL/RPEL claim (n=18)
Responsibility for deciding the admissibility of Non-formal learning as a suitable basis for APEL/RPEL claims (n=21)
Practices associated with the assessment of Non-formal learning as the basis for APEL/RPEL claims (n=26):

- Each is assessed on merit
- Consult with an external body eg NARIC
- We have a list
- We use someone else’s list
- Mapped against learning outcomes
Methods for assessing RPEL claims - credit exchange v developmental model (n=20)
Content of reflective reviews (n=13)

- Statement summarising professional attainment: 10
- Reference to evidence of professional attainment: 12
- Use of academic literature: 8
- Statement outlining future actions: 8
Summary and conclusions

- Enables an estimation of the number of students engaged in WBL in English and Welsh universities- 10,000-20,000
- Is not a comprehensive survey- some very large providers are excluded.
- Seems unlikely there is much awareness of MOOCs as potential learning tools or much demand. More generally there is more scope for recognising Non-formal learning
- Provides valuable broader lessons about flexibility in terms of curriculum design, short cycle awards and APL/RPL practices
- Gives some insight into the variety of practices in some respects but not others- the survey identified only four universities where the curriculum is potentially fully negotiable. I suspect it is probably only two. Are still many barriers to the effective use of APL/RPL
- Highlights the need for more comprehensive surveys both in respect of WBL and APL/RPL