# FutureLearn Academic Network (FLAN) Report

**Report on third meeting, 13 May 2014**

**Subject:** Workshop convened at the OU by Eileen Scanlon and Mike Sharples (IET) and the FutureLearn administrative team

**Attendance:** Attendees represented a range of FL partners from across the UK, including Southampton, Strathclyde, Edinburgh, Leicester, UEA and Sheffield.

**Format:** Five presentations were used to spark discussion: Mike Sharples (OU) and David Major (FutureLearn) spoke about FL data and visualisations, including a look at peer review. Amy Woodgate (Edinburgh) spoke about learning design on Edinburgh MOOCs. Gráinne Conole (Leicester) spoke about learning design and MOOC classification, and Rebecca Ferguson (OU) spoke about the links between learning design and learning analytics. The talks were followed after lunch by small-group and plenary discussions about development of FL and FLAN.

**Peer review:** Figures on peer review show this to be working well. Eight courses have used peer review – nearly 6,000 assignments have been submitted, attracting almost 10,000 reviews. An average assignment is around 300 words long, and an average review is about 80 words long. A first review usually arrives in a little over three hours, and the majority of submissions receive more than one review.

**Edinburgh approach to MOOCs:** Edinburgh has a broad spectrum of courses available on FutureLearn and Coursera. These are produced using a team approach, and cross-faculty collaboration is actively encouraged. A MOOC is a three-year commitment, with initial start-up costs covered by the university, and responsibility for funding facilitation handed over to the faculties in subsequent years. MOOCs are not intended to make money. The perceived advantages include:

* Knowledge exchange initiatives
* Publicising research projects to new audiences
* Opportunities to research online delivery methods
* Build the university’s capacity in online learning
* Entry point for new lecturers into online learning and into course development
* Content reuse
* Inspiration for peers
* Student enrichment
* Re-energise learning and teaching
* Setting new standards for resources

Impact that has already been seen across the institution includes: new applications for MSc programmes, more faculties are now online, interdisciplinary courses and collaborations have been developed, staff are beginning to take more risks with learning delivery, and the student experience is improving.

**Changes to the network:** The group agreed to develop closer ties with FutureLearn, and to change its name to the FutureLearn Academic Network (previously it was the *Future Learning* Academic Network). All FutureLearn partners will be encouraged to join, to share data and research findings, and to carry out comparative studies. FutureLearn will support the network with staff time, meeting space and administrative support. There will also be opportunities to engage in research projects sponsored by FutureLearn. FutureLearn will not seek to restrict publication of findings, although it would like to see pre-print versions of papers. Conduits between FLAN and FutureLearn will be Mike Sharples (OU), Russell Beale and Kathy Skelton.

**Suggestions for FutureLearn:** Group discussion identified many ways in which the FutureLearn platform could be developed. These included: extend the functionality of existing tools, enable small-group discussion, make it easier to find people and discussion topics on the site, notifications of responses to discussions in which you are involved, make it easier to identify super-users who help others, introduce sand-box areas, introduce new user roles, develop resources for ‘Zombie MOOCs’ that refuse to die and want to keep on learning.

**Suggestions for FLAN:** Group discussion also identified many ways in which the FLAN network could be developed. These included: Google Doc to share learning design tools, shared bibliography, an externally facing website in Wordpress, a closed Facebook group, workshops and summer schools aligned with pre-existing conferences, a student group, action research that brings new sets of practitioners into the network, our own conference – perhaps in September 2015. FutureLearn is keen to support a conference, and would be willing to contribute time and resources.

**Points of interest from discussion:**

Southampton and Reading both invited enthusiastic and helpful learners back to help with the next presentation, and this has been successful.

Strathclyde has used its Forensic Science MOOC as an assessed course for first-year students, and this has proved to be more fit for purpose than the course they were previously using.

Southampton is using its MOOC materials in the classroom, alongside the online MOOC. Academics got so much value from FL comments and discussion that they wanted to do this.

**Next meetings:** A meeting at Southampton in September 2014 will focus on links with and lessons from virtual spaces and games. The following meeting, at Edinburgh, will focus on Evaluation and on Ethics.