

Can a MOOC help me get a job? Reflections from an EU funded project on MOOCs and employability (0160)

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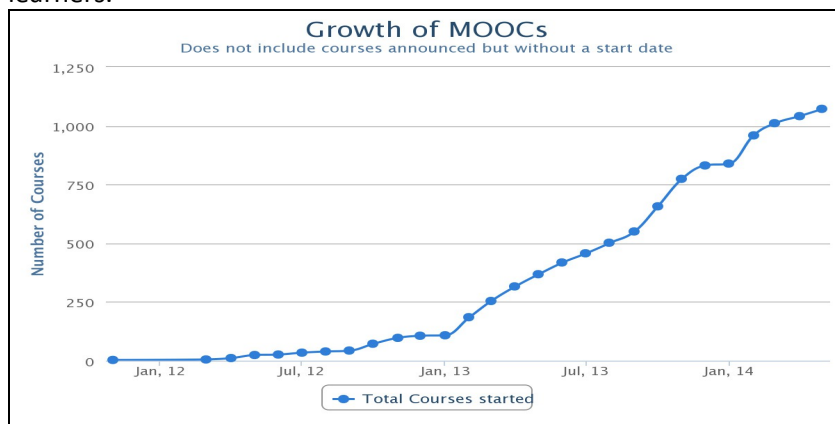
The members of the DESTINY [1] academic team from partner countries are as follows:

UK: Crete: Slovenia: Tenerife:

Introduction

This paper examines the achievements of DESTINY, a 3 year (2014 – 2017) trans-national project exploring the relationship between MOOCs and employability. Section 1 introduces the project partners and sets the research context, questions and method. Further sections summarise findings to date and indicate the potential impact of the project when completed.

MOOCs (Massive Open On-line Courses) are simply one form of on-line learning, but with increasing power and speed of readily accessible computing technology, there has been a recent 'explosion' in the uptake of MOOCs by learners.



Source: MOOCs in 2013 Breaking Down the Numbers EdSurge News [2]

One quick search for “MOOC” on Google Scholar will bring over 27,000 results. MOOCs arouse strong interest from various stakeholders – students, teachers, politicians. What then can this project add? First it should be recognised that this project is not primarily about MOOCs, rather it stems from the wide acceptance that although there are unfilled jobs available in the EU, these jobs are inaccessible to work seekers who do not possess the skills the employers are looking for. [3] Works seekers are not only the unemployed; they also include ‘under-employed’ [4] and those in low paid jobs seeking career progression. Since it was beyond the scope of a single project of this nature to investigate the entirety of the EU economy, four sectors were chosen, to fit with the expertise of the partners [6]. These sectors were:

- Leisure and Tourism (Spain),
- Engineering and Technology (Crete),
- Business and Finance (Slovenia)
- Health and social care (UK).

MOOCs are thus merely a tool used to address the more fundamental question of how can we give these work seekers the skills that employers want, so that they can access the jobs available in the current economy.

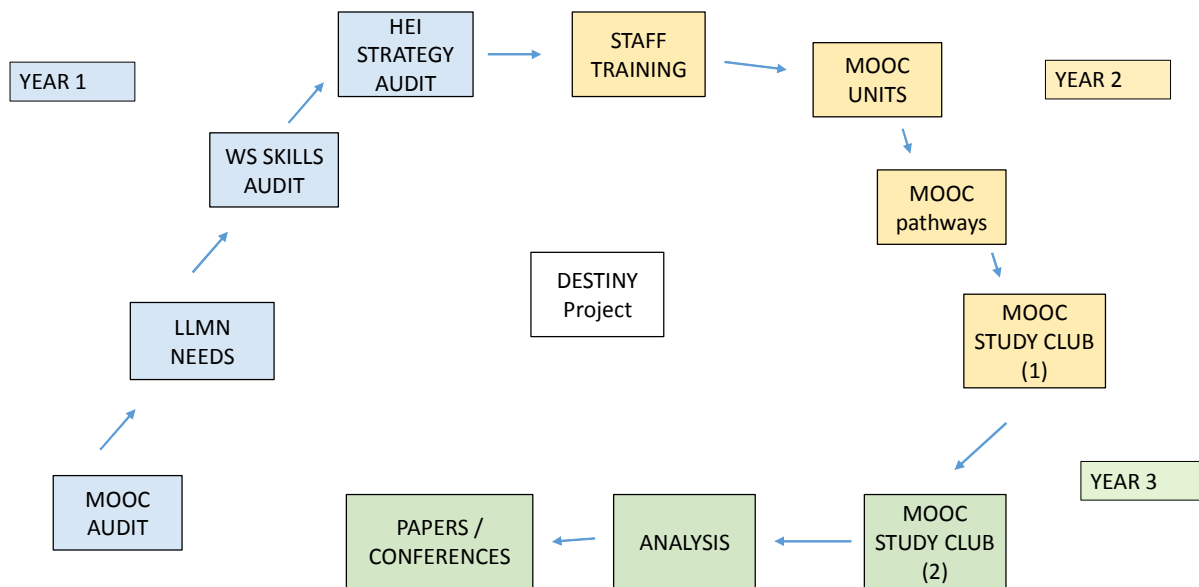
Research Questions

The project is framed around the following research questions:

1. What type of employment opportunities exist in the four sectors, and what skills are required by employers for these jobs?
2. What are the skills gaps between the skills sought by employers and the skills offered by local work-seekers?
3. In what ways can MOOCs provide an effective means of equipping work-seekers with these skills?
4. What is the response of HEIs to the emergence of MOOCs and their potential to support work seekers?

Research methods:

The project phases can be represented by the following diagram:



In **Phase 1** Local MOOC audit reports were completed by four HEIs, each investigating one sector. Drawing on the four local reports, a consolidated MOOC audit report was completed. Executive summaries from the local reports are available on the website: www.destiny-eu.net

In **Phase 2** electronic labour market needs surveys were sent to companies in the 4 sectors, to an agreed selection based on number of employees to achieve a minimum of 30 responses per sector. In addition a Pan-EU survey is now being carried out, and the results will be compared with the findings of the local surveys. Results will shortly be available on www.destiny-eu.net

In **Phase 3** partners will be tasked with assessing work-seeker skills, and will do this through focus group discussions with work seekers in the four partner countries. From these results we anticipate a pattern will emerge of either technical or transversal skills that, if developed, will enhance the work-seekers' ability to access employment.

The **final phases** of the project will author and deliver targeted MOOCs in a supportive 'study club' environment and will monitor the results. HEI engagement with MOOCs will be explored (at practitioner level - using surveys, and the strategic view of MOOCs impact at the executive level - using structured interviews), as well as the recognition of MOOCs as pathways to conventional courses and qualifications.

Summary:

Our findings from phase one indicate that there is widespread awareness of MOOCs, but low participation, although our surveys clearly indicate that there is an appetite among learners for MOOCs which are linked to employment.

Our observations so far indicate that for a work-seeker, the sheer volume and complexity of the MOOCs on offer present a far from simple pathway to navigate. We suggest that motivation to use MOOCs to 'up-skill' may be low, since there is little evidence that employers will recognise the skills gained from this type of learning, or that job opportunities will be increased. We propose to develop targeted information and guidance for work-seekers in the 4 sectors, to encourage participation, retention and completion of MOOC studies. We also aim to educate the educators as to the potential of MOOCs, and to increase awareness in employers of their potential value.

Impact:

For the first time in history, courses that were limited to a small number of students are now open to the entire world--or at least those with access to the Internet. [1] MOOCs are expected to be one of the technologies that could revolutionise the world by the next decade [5]. It is of great significance then if this project can demonstrate how a more structured

approach to the use of MOOCs to increase employability among work seekers can increase both efficiency and effectiveness. Our approach will have impact on key stakeholder groups: Academics, work-seekers and employers, but also policy makers at local, National and EU level. Our impact will be through:

- Improved careers advice and guidance for work-seekers
- Defined MOOC ‘pathways’ to higher learning and qualifications,
- Improved institutional MOOC awareness and capability among HEIs
- Increased awareness of MOOC potential value among employers and recruiters
- Increased understanding of HEI strategic response to MOOCs

But let us not lose sight of the main goal – **high quality Jobs for our work-seekers!**

References:

[1] DESTINY: Developing Employability Skills Through INnovative education using MOOCs for Youth Erasmus+ 2014-1-UK01-KA203-001625

[2]Shah D <https://www.edsurge.com/n/2013-12-22-moocs-in-2013-breaking-down-the-numbers>

[3] Dolphin T European Jobs and Skills [3]http://www.ippr.org/assets/media/publications/pdf/European-jobs-and-skills_Apr2014.pdf?noredirect=1

[4] http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/social_sector/converting_education_to_employment_in_europe

[5] Pretz, K. (2014) ‘10 technologies that could change the world by 2022’, IEEE – The Institute, 12 November.

[6] The project partners:

Country:	ORGANISATION	ORGANISATION WEBSITE
UK	STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY	www.staffs.ac.uk
UK	BITJAM LIMITED	www.bitjam.org.uk
SPAIN	UNIVERSIDAD DE LA LAGUNA	http://www.ull.es
SPAIN	EVM PROJECT MANAGEMENT EXPERTS S.L.	www.evm.net
CRETE	TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CRETE	www.teicrete.gr
CRETE	SENTIMENT ANALYSIS	sentiment.gr
SLOVENIA	DOBA FAKULTETA	www.fakulteta.doba.si
SLOVENIA	KADIS D.O.O. LJUBLJANA	www.kadis.si