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# The OpenupEd quality label: benchmarks for MOOCs

Jon Rosewell<sup>1</sup> & Darco Jansen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Open University, UK  
[Jon.Rosewell@open.ac.uk](mailto:Jon.Rosewell@open.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup>European Association of Distance Teaching Universities, The Netherlands  
[darco.jansen@eadtu.eu](mailto:darco.jansen@eadtu.eu)

**Abstract:** We report on the development of the OpenupEd Quality Label, a self-assessment and review quality assurance process for the new OpenupEd MOOC portal ([www.openuped.eu](http://www.openuped.eu)). This process is focused on benchmark statements that seek to capture good practice, both at the level of the institution and at the level of individual courses. The benchmark statements are derived from benchmarks which emerged from the E-xcellence e-learning quality projects. Self-assessment and review is intended to encourage quality enhancement, captured in an action plan. A quality label for MOOCs will benefit all MOOC stakeholders.

**Keywords:** MOOC, e-learning, quality assurance, distance education

## Introduction

The rise of MOOCs has been recent and rapid (for an overview, see Daniel, 2012; Yuan & Powell, 2013). By 2012, Daniel and others were noting that the earlier courses based on connectivist learning (cMOOCs) were being joined by large numbers of courses based on a transmission or behaviourist model of teaching and learning (xMOOCs), often delivered through a platform such as Coursera, Udacity and edX. However, questions had begun to be asked about the quality of the MOOC experience (for example, Yuan & Powell, 2013; Haggard, 2013). The massive numbers enrolling were tempered by low completion rates (University of Edinburgh, 2013; Clow, 2013). The rhetoric around MOOCs sometimes makes the claim they will increase access to higher education, but can that be justified if large numbers of MOOC students have the experience of failing to complete their course?

## The OpenupEd initiative

The OpenupEd initiative was launched by the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) with support from the European Commission on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2013. It aims to provide a pan-European portal for MOOCs ([www.openuped.eu](http://www.openuped.eu)).

OpenupEd promises to bring some distinctive features to the MOOC landscape. The launch partners (see <http://openuped.eu/partners/current-partners>) can apply their extensive experience of open and distance learning to MOOCs. In addition, OpenupEd partners have a commitment to opening up education to the benefit both of learners and of wider society, while reflecting “European values such as equity, quality and diversity” (Commissioner Vassiliou in European Commission, 2013). To ensure that OpenupEd courses meet this mission, partners are asked to endorse the eight distinctive features described below.

*Openness to learners:* This captures aspects such as: open entry (no formal admission requirements), freedom to study at time, place and pace of choice, and flexible pathways. In a broader perspective this feature stresses the importance of being open to learners' needs and providing for a wide variety of lifelong learners.

*Digital openness:* Courses should be freely available online but in addition apply open licensing so that material and data can be reused, remixed, reworked and redistributed (e.g. using CC-BY-SA or similar).

*Learner-centred approach:* Courses should aid students to construct their own learning from a rich environment, and to share and communicate it with others; they should not simply focus on the transmission of content knowledge to the student.

*Independent learning:* Courses should provide high quality materials to enable an independent learner to progress through self-study.

*Media-supported interaction:* Course materials should make best use of online affordances (interactivity, communication, collaboration) as well as rich media (video and audio) to engage students with their learning.

*Recognition options:* Successful course completion should be recognised as indicating worthwhile educational achievement.

*Quality focus:* There should be a consistent focus on quality in the production and presentation of a course.

*Spectrum of diversity:* A course should be inclusive and accessible to the wide diversity of citizens.

A distinctive aspect of OpenupEd is the promise of a quality educational experience that can bridge between informal and formal learning and provide recognition for the student's achievement. This promise is to be encapsulated in a 'quality label'.

## **The OpenupEd Quality Label**

The OpenupEd Quality Label is intended to encourage quality enhancement. It was derived from the E-xcellence label (<http://e-xcellencelabel.eadtu.eu/>) which provides a methodology for assessing the quality of e-learning in higher education (HE). E-xcellence has evolved over a series of projects commencing in 2005 (Williams, Kear, Rosewell & Ferreira, 2011). E-xcellence now provides a series of tools, including a manual (Williams, Kear & Rosewell, 2012) and interactive 'quick scan' self-assessment, that support a review process based around a number of benchmark statements. For the OpenupEd Quality Label, we drafted a revised set of benchmarks and a self-assessment and review process better suited to MOOCs. These were first presented at a master class at the 2013 EADTU conference (<http://conference.eadtu.eu/>). This draft was updated using feedback gathered at this event, and then made available for further review, with comment invited from OpenupEd partners and E-xcellence assessors. The final version was published in January 2014 (<http://openuped.eu/mooc-features/openuped-label>) and the benchmarks are listed in Appendix 1 below.

An outline of the OpenupEd Quality Label process is as follows. OpenupEd partners are expected to be higher education institutions (HEI) that meet national requirements for quality assurance and accreditation and that have an internal procedure to approve a MOOC. New partners will obtain the OpenupEd Quality Label by a self-assessment and review process that will consider benchmarks both at institutional and course level (for two courses initially). The HEI should endorse the eight distinctive OpenupEd features listed above; in particular, every MOOC must demonstrate the features 'openness to learners' and 'digital openness'. The OpenupEd Quality Label must be renewed periodically. Between institutional reviews, additional MOOCs will be reviewed at course level

only. The institution is expected to evaluate and monitor each MOOC in presentation, providing quantitative data including participation, appreciation, and completion and qualitative assessment regarding equity, quality, and diversity.

The self-assessment and review are focussed around the benchmarks given in Appendix 1. A ‘quick scan’ checklist is provided (Figure 1) which lists the benchmarks with an accompanying grid to record two aspects. First, an overall judgement can be made on whether the benchmark is achieved (on a four-point scale: not achieved, partially achieved, largely achieved, or fully achieved). Secondly, an outline mapping is provided between each benchmark and the eight OpenUpEd distinctive features; this can be adapted where necessary. The quick scan can be used to give an initial picture of areas of strength and weakness. It can also highlight: where benchmarks may not be fully appropriate, where they may fail to capture good practice in a particular HEI or MOOC; and where additional detailed indicators might be helpful. The quick scan should then be fleshed out by a more detailed self-assessment process, ideally including different stakeholders such as academics, managers, course designers and students. This should gather evidence for each benchmark including the extent to which they support the distinctive OpenupEd features. A plan detailing improvement actions is then prepared. These two documents form the basis of a final review and discussion with external assessors, who then prepare a final report including their recommendation for the award of the OpenupEd Quality Label.

Benchmark/indicator		OL	DO	LC	IL	MI	RO	QF	SD	NA	PA	LA	FA
<b>Course level</b>													
22	A clear statement of learning outcomes for both knowledge and skills is provided.	10			x								
23	There is reasoned coherence between learning outcomes, course content, teaching and learning strategy (including use of media), and assessment methods.	11		x	x	x		x					
24	Course activities aid students to construct their own learning and to communicate it to others.			x									

**Figure 1 Part of the quick scan checklist, showing benchmarks, mapping to OpenupEd features, and grid for recording benchmark achievement**

A number of documents support this process, including templates for the quick scan checklist, evidence gathering and action plan. Assessor’s notes are provided that cross-reference the OpenupEd benchmarks to additional indicators and background material in the E-xcellence manual (Williams, Kear & Rosewell, 2012), with supplementary material provided for MOOC-specific aspects where

necessary. It is anticipated that this documentation will be extended in the light of experience.

## **Conclusion**

The OpenupEd Quality Label is an attempt to address a criticism of MOOCs: they may offer a poor quality educational experience. The OpenupEd label it should benefit all stakeholders in MOOCs. Students can be reassured about the experience they are committing to. Employers can recognise the content and skills demonstrated by a MOOC certificate. MOOC authors can achieve recognition for their input. Institutions can protect their brand reputation. Funders can be reassured that products are worthwhile. Quality agencies, who work on behalf of all the above parties, may find their task eased.

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## **Appendix 1: OpenupEd quality benchmarks**

### **Institutional level**

#### *Strategic management*

- 1 The institution has a MOOC strategy that relates to its overarching strategies for e learning, open education and open licensing.
- 2 Research and monitoring of developments in education and technology inform the design of MOOCs. There is an organisational framework to foster this.
- 3 The institution has a strategy for the appropriate resourcing of MOOC development. It has a business model, appropriate to the institutional mission, that addresses the sustainability of MOOCs.
- 4 The institution has a service relationship to MOOC participants that addresses ethical and legal dimensions including accessibility and data protection.

- 5 Collaborative and partnership activities have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and operational agreements exist where appropriate. Policies exist to cover issues such as intellectual property rights and open licensing.
- 6 The institution has a quality policy that relates to national frameworks, and the MOOC offering is related to that policy.

#### *Curriculum design*

- 7 The institution makes explicit the relationship between its MOOC portfolio and its mainstream curriculum.
- 8 The MOOC portfolio provides for the development of students' cognitive skills, key/transferrable skills, and professional/practical skills in addition to knowledge and understanding.

#### *Course design*

- 9 The institution provides templates or guidelines for layout and presentation of MOOCs to support consistency across the portfolio. These templates have the flexibility to accommodate a range of teaching and learning methods.
- 10 Course materials, including the intended learning outcomes, are regularly reviewed, up-dated and improved using feedback from stakeholders.
- 11 The institution specifies an open licence for MOOC components, and has a mechanism to track intellectual property rights.

#### *Course delivery*

- 12 The MOOC platform is reliable, secure and assures appropriate levels of privacy. Provision is made for system maintenance, monitoring and review of performance.
- 13 The MOOC platform provides a range of online tools which are appropriate for the educational models adopted.
- 14 Mechanisms exist to monitor and evaluate MOOCs using quantitative and qualitative approaches.

#### *Staff support*

- 15 The institution provides appropriate training for academic and support staff to develop the skills required to develop and deliver e learning.
- 16 Educational research and innovation in e learning are regarded as high status activities. There are mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice.
- 17 The institution provides adequate support and resources to MOOC staff and manages workloads appropriately.

### *Student support*

- 18 MOOC students are provided with clear and up-to-date information about courses including aims/objectives, learning and assessment methods, workload and prerequisite knowledge. Where possible, courses should be related to national or European academic frameworks or specifications.
- 19 The rights, roles and responsibilities of MOOC students and those of their institution are clearly stated.
- 20 The institution uses social networking to foster academic communities among MOOC students.
- 21 MOOC students have clear routes to academic, technical and administrative support. The level of support provided by the institution is clearly stated.

### **Course level**

- 22 A clear statement of learning outcomes for both knowledge and skills is provided.
- 23 There is reasoned coherence between learning outcomes, course content, teaching and learning strategy (including use of media), and assessment methods.
- 24 Course activities aid students to construct their own learning and to communicate it to others.
- 25 The course content is relevant, accurate, and current.
- 26 Staff who write and deliver the course have the skills and experience to do so successfully.
- 27 Course components have an open licence and are correctly attributed. Reuse of material is supported by the appropriate choice of formats and standards.
- 28 Courses conform to guidelines for layout, presentation and accessibility.
- 29 The course contains sufficient interactivity (student-to-content or student-to-student) to encourage active engagement. The course provides learners with regular feedback through self-assessment activities, tests or peer feedback.
- 30 Learning outcomes are assessed using a balance of formative and summative assessment appropriate to the level of certification.
- 31 Assessment is explicit, fair, valid and reliable. Measures appropriate to the level of certification are in place to counter impersonation and plagiarism.
- 32 Course materials are reviewed, updated and improved using feedback from stakeholders.

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