School of Informatics MOOCs Arrangements

Informatics MOOC Group - Dave Robertson, Ian Stark, Michael Rovatsos, Austin Tate
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Current Status of Informatics involvement in the University MOOC Initiative

The University of Edinburgh has chosen to partner with Cousera to provide an initial set of "Massive Open On-line Courses" (MOOCs) with six courses from across the University starting in January 2013 - http://www.coursera.org/edinburgh

With the strong encouragement of the Head of School, the Principal and the Vice Principal for Distance Education, Informatics was invited to be involved in this initial experiment with financial support for the development and first delivery phases from central University Distance Education Initiative funds. An initial MOOC on AI Planning is being developed by Gerhard Wickler and Austin Tate and will be delivered by them and three TAs over a 5 week period from January 2013.

The courses are being provided as a formal three year commitment by the University with at least one repeat of each course per annum, and will have an appropriate element of quality control that is being done via the University Curriculum & Student Progression Committee via a Course Design Outline for each course and via a University MOOC Group. The initial courses are not for formal credit.

The Heads of Schools involved have been asked by the Vice Principal for Distance Education, Jeff Haywood, to ensure the commitment is not one on individuals, and that a sustainable model is created for developing, refining and delivering the current courses in future years and for any new MOOCs suggested from now on that are proposed by a School.

Note that support resources for the current Informatics pilot MOOC are being supplied centrally, and with staff involved who would not otherwise be part of this year's Informatics teaching.

Institutionalising MOOCs into our Teaching Programme

We need a way to consider and if appropriate "approve" a MOOC and a resource allocation towards it as a school commitment. A working group has been set up comprising the Head of School, Director and Deputy Director of Teaching and Coordinator for Distance Education, plus any other useful invitees, to act as the School's "MOOC Group" and to consider, discuss with the proposers and subsequently to make recommendations to the Head of School and hence Teaching Committee/Board of Studies on any proposals for future MOOCs. The School MOOC group is not empowered to take any decisions on such MOOC courses. Any MOOC proposals from a School will initially be considered by the University MOOC group and Distance Education Initiative.

[ACTION: We invite Teaching Committee to endorse the establishment of the "Informatics MOOC Group" or propose refinements to the process described.]
MOOCs in the long term can only be sustained and developments encouraged if they are treated as a normal teaching commitment for which the effort involved could be significant in terms of development, production and levels of student engagement during delivery via the rich social platforms provided to support MOOCs.

A MOOC will probably be a rather heavy commitment in terms of development, production, refinements and delivery load. An initial step would be to treat the teaching load as approx. equivalent to one MSc module and then to monitor the situation as we gain more experience.

[ACTION: Discuss the proposal that a typical MOOC is considered for teaching duty allocation as similar to a standard 10-credit course.]

There will be a heavy need for MOOC TA support to make the social element and course team feedback elements of the MOOC work at the scale of the number of participants involved. At present on the initial Informatics MOOC, TA costs are to be provided and paid for by the central DEI/MOOC fund, so there is no cost implication yet to the School. But in future if we add a MOOC we will have to fund the TAs needed too.

[ACTION: None. Note only]

Preparing the ground for Informatics Distance Education Initiatives

The University already runs over 40 on-line learning programmes, mostly part-time MSc degrees and some professional development. These are full-credit programmes with student fees and final awards equivalent to on-campus degrees.

Link: http://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/postgraduate/online-distance-learning

The aim for the central University Distance Education Initiative (DEI) is to focus on these full-credit programmes rather than individual courses. For Informatics to be involved, we could create or convert enough content to make a complete on-line MSc programme; prepare a joint programme with another school; or collaborate with other schools to include individual courses in their existing programmes. For example, there is a particularly successful MSc programme in e-Learning.

From our current level of involvement, reaching a full distance-learning MSc programme might be five or more years away. However, as an intermediate step we could aim to have a small number of courses within other schools' existing distance education programmes within a couple of years. This is a more recognisable target from here, and such courses fit more easily within our existing processes – with similar class sizes, paying students, and conventional assessment. Indeed, we might even already have courses using as much online material as those delivered at a distance.

[ACTION: Start to discuss interest in aiming towards specific distance education targets, such as individual courses or an entire MSc. Are there other routes we might take to making our existing teaching more available at a distance?]