# OEB: The Value and Price of Open Online Courses

## Proposed Structure:

- Introduction of the session by chairperson (3 minutes)
  - Reading of session description (1 minute)
  - Chairperson's comments (2 minutes - to be prepared)
- 4 x Panelist Contributions (40 minutes)
  - 30 second introduction from chairperson
  - 5 minutes contribution from panelist
  - Question from chairperson + response (4 minutes)
- Open discussion to the floor (40 minutes)
- 5 minutes "Wrap up"

## Brian Introduction

### Session description

"Learners worldwide have the opportunity to access relevant course subjects. They are able to experience what tailored, personalised learning means and can gain knowledge and credits. But if open online learning can be equivalent or even superior to face-to-face education, what does this mean for the value and the price of MOOCs for institutions, for learning communities, for learners and for the creation of new knowledge?"

### Brian's addition

**You can learn almost anything online**. For free! From playing the guitar to computer coding. So, in this spirit, I searched for "**how to chair a debate**" and got "**chair throwing debate**".  It seems that these videos are very popular on Youtube.  However, a search for "**how to moderate a panel discussion**" did yield good results.  **So you can learn almost anything online for free**. Having said that, I was short of time and listened to the **videos at double speed**, so this now you are going to see the result of that learning experience.

In the end, even in the world of free online education, there is significant effort involved and **somebody has to pay for all of this**. Will open learning be like the **music business**, where the big names have come to terms with the idea of not making much money off content, and so hope to build sustainability on **added value services** (and the l**esser known artists** just do it for free in the hope of becoming bigger or just because they love it)? Will the **big institutions remain willing to create expensive** high-quality free courses **after the hype is over** and their courses are l**ost in a sea of free courses** from all over the world? Will there be a **multitude of amateurs creating free courses** for their own personal satisfaction or in the hope of a little fame, and the most brilliant rising to top even the more expensive ones? **Will the learners want more**? They not only want to learn but also have some **trustworthy verification of their learning** that they can use to **find employment**. Can **a sustainable ecosystem** of learners, course developers, and accreditors **emerge** that will satisfy the emerging explosion in demand for affordable learning?

## Diana Laurillard, UCL Knowledge Lab.

"Given the global demand for higher education, how might we use learning technologies to make HE more affordable, on the large scale? There are ways in which we can use technology to increase teacher productivity, and to increase the number of teachers. My contribution will show how we are experimenting with an online 'course resource appraisal modeller' (CRAM) to help teachers plan how we might solve the conundrum of meeting the demand of 200m per year (mainly from emerging economies) on a staff:student ratio of around 1:25 for a university education."

Course Appraisal Modeler
http://bit.ly/2gMATPe

**Brian:** How can you estimate effort when there are so many variables involved? Eg quality

**Brian:** If universities do not improve on productivity and thus cost, will learners in the developed world move towards alternative credentials which may become as trustworthy and possibly more employable as well as less costly? Or will the "signalling" value of higher education in the

developed world ensure that demand will remain and therefore remove the pressure to change?

**Brian:** Should developing countries really copy the model of higher education in the developed world or should they concentrate on scaling up vocational education and developing alternative reliable credentialing systems?

## Stephen Downes, National Research Council, Canada.

- First – I definitely agree that remarks should be kept short. Interactive is far more engaging.
- Second – I would argue that we have already proven that learning technology *can* make education more affordable, and the debate is really about *whether* we should do so.
- Third – I question whether academia and industry genuinely want access to learning to become more affordable. Were we successful in lowering the cost of learning to affordable levels, the industry would declare it a disaster.
- Fourth – the way forward is found not in us providing an education more cheaply, but in us enabling people to create and manage their own education.

New Thoughts
- On the idea that expensive university MOOCs were 'high quality' - on what grounds do we claim quality?
- What do we mean even by a course?
- Laurillard's course - income - etc. (was it even worth the effort to charge 4.70 per student)
- 'Whether it is financially viable'

**Brian:** Why should we not make education more affordable?
Stephen: We should!

**Brian:** Why would institutions not want to make education more affordable? (It will most likely happen slowly and there are plenty of other things for universities to do and plenty of time to adjust).
Stephen: Why should it happen slowly? I think the major factor at play here is indifference. Look at open access publishing - even though it's widely encouraged, professors simply don't do it. Another major factor is the belief that only a traditional university education will do, that professors in their current role are indispensable, etc. Look at the 21:1 ratio. Why should we accept that?

**Brian:** What are the barriers to individuals managing their own education and how might they be overcome?

First,. We don't teach people to manage their own education, we teach them to follow instructions. This needs to change. Also, we need to find methods of recognition that are provider-independent.

**Brian:** Will we need alternative trustworthy systems outside HE to guide, verify and track personal learning if HE does not respond to the need for lower cost education?

## Nina Hunterman, edX

- I will address two initiatives edX has launched this year to leverage MOOCs to meet economic and social challenges.
- First, work force development and the skills gap. Specifically, we are working directly with industry and in partnership with our university members to identify, develop and deliver MOOC programs that help current employees and prospective employees upskill and reskill for new in demand jobs. The model is flexible and, as we continue to develop the edX platform, empowers learners to mix, stack and create personalized pathways to meet their education needs.
- Second, refugee education. Specifically, we have partnered with Kiron (a German-based nonprofit organization founded in 2015, who is also on the OEB agenda) to develop and deliver online education to refugee populations for the first year or two of college requirements. The edX MOOCs that Kiron students take and complete are then recognized for credit at Kiron partner universities, advancing those students through an on campus university degree.
- Our approach at edX is not to replace universities or the residential experience, but to work in partnership with our university members to expand access, support life long learning and reskilling as needed, and leverage online education to address social and economic challenges.
- Stephen raises an important point about the business model and the willingness of both industry and academia to support lower cost education. As a nonprofit MOOC provider, we find our university and industry partners are compelled by our mission, but the cost of developing and delivering high quality online courses and programs is significant. Support for this endeavor comes from many different sectors, but sustainability is a concern.

**Brian:** only 5,000 eligible - not really commercially viable - is the "micro-masters" idea not both more disruptive and has more viability potential.

Is there an element of "don't scare the horses" here where those "in the know" realise that open learning will ultimately severely disrupt residential learning but do not wish to openly claim this?

**Brian:** Is the "quality in open learning" agenda not driven by large institutions not wishing to damage their reputation publicly? We all know that classroom teaching quality is extremely variable and mostly simple in nature yet large providers tend to insist on high production values for MOOCs. If we accepted that simple approaches (ala Khan Academy) represent significant value would sustainability be less of an issue?

**Brian:** Are the "micromasters" just a testing of the waters for the full blown MOOC based degrees that will shortly emerge - as soon as the idea is accepted by learners and faculty - this compelling financial model will quickly emerge and dominate?  Is the recently announced agreement between a subset of edX members to mutually recognise each other's' MOOCs a harbinger of a radical change in HE?

## Konstantin Scheller European Commission, Belgium

I'm very flexible and happy to adapt to any format and/or the previous speakers. What I would like to do in the little intro in any case is to explain the EU's role (very short… not the 6h version ;) ) and then of course our current perspective on MOOCs and possibly related issues. Otherwise a few thoughts I might throw in:

It seems to be a hype to say that MOOCs are/were just a hype; but for sure we haven't seen their final evolution yet. And governments are certainly still VERY interested, for many reasons & purposes (e.g. teacher training).

Way forward is very unclear – most (all??) MOOC platforms seem to be not self-sustainable at this stage.

The big question is the value for the learners. Of course learning in itself is valuable;  and in many cases the participants just want to broaden their horizon or develop specific skills, so no need for validation. But once there's a price attached and certainly with how MOOCs are 'sold' (marketed) we have to look at recognition and validation. It has two sides - recognition for credit at university, or recognition for employment. The answers to these will be different; our main concern is that this should not establish parallel systems (e.g. to ECTS) as that would just lead to more confusion.

There are plenty of related questions - identity validation, how to assess, etc. - and all this will tell us as much about MOOCs as about HE in general.

A core concern for learners: how to know a MOOC is good?

Possible questions to the group off the top of my hat:

Who should take charge of quality assurance? Can the platforms (or providers) do that alone?

How do MOOCs and MOOC production by universities fit with European universities' public interest mission? Should governments pay universities to provide MOOCs?

Can/could MOOCs lead to a devaluation of what a university course or degree is? It might make access more democratic (actually not fully if there is cost attached), but is a MOOC really the same thing as a university course/module? Or does it just look similar?

**Brian:**  Why not let the end user judge the quality?  Do we really need another costly layer slowing down supply and possibly driving up costs as MOOC producers try to "tick boxes"?

**Brian:**  If governments essentially fund university teaching can MOOC versions of courses not just replace some of the existing courses -

should "regular" MOOC building just be part of our day jobs?  Are we afraid to show the world what regular courses in university really look like?

**Brian:** If we move to approving assessment methods for awarding accreditation for MOOCs, which may be worthwhile in itself, should that no allay fears of degrading the reputation of University courses rather than try to measure the quality of the MOOCs?

~~Keep it short~~

Value of a MOOC
- Helping teachers a lot
- How does the learner know it's a good MOOC?
    - So far, it's all just the label of the university
- Recognition and validation?