



Questions about MOOCs answered



SCL

Leading & Managing
Public Libraries

What is a MOOC?

MOOCs are Massive Open Online Courses. They are short, bite-sized courses developed by universities and other academic institutions for people to access for free on the internet. Typically they include a 6-8 week syllabus of targeted learning content, with learning resources provided online via written, audio and video materials.

There are thousands of MOOCs available for people to study for free on the Internet, but not all of them are good quality. The Society of Chief Librarians has a partnership agreement with FutureLearn <https://www.futurelearn.com/> which provides a selection of courses from leading universities and cultural institutions from around the world. It is owned by the Open University and the courses provided are from leading academic institutions.

FutureLearn MOOCs are usually offered on a time-limited basis based on academic terms. As long as the learner signs up before the end of the course they can access all the course content in their own time.

Why are they important for our library users?

MOOCs offer opportunities for people to explore subjects they think they may be interested in through high quality courses online with prestigious universities, without the cost or commitment of a full-time university course.

There are no entry requirements and MOOCs can be accessed from any computer at any location, including your home or library. There is no limit to the number of people who can sign up to a MOOC.

Most MOOCs are free to access and they are available in a huge range of topics, from basic financial literacy to complex scientific and medical courses.

They are ideal for independent study but MOOC students also often like to meet up and discuss their studies, with libraries offering ideal meeting points for self-organised study groups.

Recommendations for supporting MOOCs in your public library service

- 1. Learn about MOOCs before offering them to your local population**
 - Encourage at least one member of staff or volunteer to sign up for a MOOC and attempt to follow the resources, in order to understand what the challenges may be for MOOC students and how your library service could support them
 - Have a look at the content of a MOOC before recommending it to library users because it may be too challenging or not as relevant as you thought.
- 2. Start with public and stakeholder consultation**
 - Do not start a MOOC project without consulting with library users, non-users (if possible) and current MOOC students
 - It is also a good idea to consult relevant local stakeholders, including in other Local Authority departments, cultural partners, voluntary sector partners and the business community, where appropriate
 - The consultation could be online/light touch but should be appropriate to the audience and consider the ways in which they would like to be consulted and would be most likely to contribute fully

Bright ideas:



If you know of any other library services also supporting MOOCs it would be a good idea to share feedback on the courses with each other so that you know which courses work best for your audiences

Bright ideas:



In our MOOC pilot project, some pilots held face-to-face consultation meetings in the library to understand what people were interested in studying and how they wanted the library to support them.

You could also use your library newsletter to link to an online survey, such as Survey Monkey.

3. Market the library offer alongside the MOOC offer

- The pilot projects suggest that cross-promotion of library resources and services with MOOCs is well received and raises awareness of the library's role in supporting informal learning (these could include information services, reference services, online resources and digital making clubs and resources)

Bright ideas:



Several pilot services advertised the MOOC via the library newsletter, library website and in library buildings. The newsletter was the most effective tool for reaching the broadest number of people.

4. Support the development of learner-led communities

- The pilots show that MOOC communities may take some time to develop in library services, but they are likely to be more sustainable and require fewer library service resources where the conditions for community-led learning groups are provided but not led by the library service
- There is also evidence that where the library closely curates the MOOC offer it is less likely to appeal to the public. However, it appears that there is value in bringing MOOC students together even if they are not studying the same thing. The library can be a good place to meet and share challenges in relation to MOOC learning in general, as well as other types of informal learning.

Bright ideas:



MOOC cafes and publicising the resources the library currently offers to support MOOCs were more popular and well attended than lessons at set times with tutors, which it was often hard to drum up interest in. One service developed a travelling display that was used in libraries throughout the borough.