MOOC: A summary description

The collaborative aspect of MOOC, and the 'anytime, anywhere' access, implies a greater degree of student engagement because MOOC are capable of providing a high degree of 'personalised' learning at scale (although there remains work to be done on testing this assertion). In an era of austerity, MOOC can assist colleges struggling with limited resources and the increasing demand for the kinds of education colleges are best placed to provide. They provide an opportunity to attract students to the institution and may encourage them to undertake further study. But, before colleges consider adopting MOOCs, there are several issues that need to be considered.

Content

The success of any MOOC will depend on the quality and relevance of the content that it delivers. The content must be appropriate to a college's specific needs, particularly to those of its students. Unlike in the large Universities, where MOOC have been pioneered, there exists a great deal more diversity in the nature of the content to be delivered. Moreover, colleges do not 'create' content in the ways that many do as a result of being research institutions. These issues raise questions who will create content (and retain the IPR) and how it might be modelled for widespread adoption.

As well as considering the nature of the content to be delivered, it is important to take into account what pedagogical practices best suit the use of MOOC as a delivery model. For instance, they are useful for applied learning where automated forms of assessment may be applicable, but they are perhaps less useful for aspects of the curriculum which require detailed qualitative forms of assessment.

Accreditation

Unlike universities, most colleges are not recognised awarding bodies and this raises the question of accreditation. Accreditation may not be essential for the widespread adoption of MOOC, if they are used to support existing provision, but as an incentive to students to undertake and complete courses then accreditation is important. Any form of accreditation allied to MOOC has to be robust, credible and allow for progression. Accreditation would also help colleges to evidence delivery as part of the audit and inspection regime.

As with any new technology or application, colleges must consider what they hope to achieve by its implementation. The rhetoric surrounding the use of MOOC in colleges should not distract from how they may enhance the delivery of appropriate, high quality education.

This primary consideration should inform the 'business case' approach teachers and managers adopt when thinking about the efficacy of MOOC as part of the curriculum and as a means of making efficiency savings.