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**MIND THE GAP**

# Using MOOCs to provide pre-entry skills support at the University of Cumbria

**[lesley.english@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:lesley.english@cumbria.ac.uk)**

# Outline

- **Introduction** to the University of Cumbria & the role of the library and academic adviser
- The **evolution of the MOOC**: where it all began
- **Creation of resources** & finding the right platform
- Small scale **research**
- **Benefits, challenges** and **moving forward**

# Introducing the University of Cumbria



- One of the UK's newest Universities
- Formed in 2007 from well established institutions: **Cumbria Institute of the arts, St Martin's College** and the **Cumbrian campus of UCLAN**
- Campuses in **5 locations** as well as Gateway sites
- Curriculum **relevant to the region**
- **Lower than expected progression to HE** based on GCSE performance in Cumbria





[cumbria.ac.uk](http://cumbria.ac.uk)

University of  
**Cumbria** 

**TEN**  
years  
2007-2017

# Demographics of our students

- 8790 students at the University, 80% are undergraduate (including foundation degree). Of the 1795 postgraduate students, 55% were studying part-time (HESA, 2016)
- 62-65% of our FT UG students have at least one **Widening Participation (WP) characteristic**
- **Post-1992 University** – students arrive with generally lower grades
- **Professional courses** e.g. nursing & midwifery, counselling, paramedic practice, OT & more. May not be as academically strong but have **significant strengths in skills** (West, 2012)



# Pre-entry support

- **Lack of preparedness for HE** is one of the main factors why students don't complete their course (Murtagh, 2012)
- Most UK HEI's prioritise the area of transition & the 'first year experience' as they are recognised in **improving student retention & success** (Thomas, 2012)
- Interventions at this pre-entry stage need to engage students, provide key information about both the University and their course to ensure they **arrive with realistic expectations**, and **develop the students' own confidence** (HEFCE, 2012a)

# Study skills support

- From March 2017 team sits within Information Services
- Converged professional service since 2009: Library & Student Services
- Blended role
- Involved in a number of pre-entry, induction & retention projects, including Head Start





# In the beginning... Head Start

The key aim of Head Start was to “raise confidence levels and in part prepare students for the demands of studying at university level” (Fraser, Shaw and Ruston, 2013, p.129).

- Project led by LiSS working with learning technologists & academics
- Uses Blackboard, University's VLE
- Accredited module launched Spring 2012 for UG applicants
- Spring 2013 - non-accredited version
- Now 5 Head Start pathways: 4 UG with subject focus & 1 at level 7 for PGCE/ School Direct



Outstanding  
Student  
Services Team

# Assessment

All assessments are self-marking quizzes

Scores feed into Grade Centre in Bb

We can see when a student has passed, when they last logged on, etc.

# What Library & Academic advisers said...



“A significant proportion of students we taught had engaged with Head Start. In particular we found Head Start students to be notably more confident and appropriately vocal in sessions.”

Kim McGowan, Information Literacy Award Winner 2013


# Data: Summer 2016

- 785** students enrolled across UG & PG pathways (532 UG & 253 PG)
- 57%** completed core element 1: 'Writing in HE' (UG variant)
- 41%** completed core element 2: 'Referencing explained' (UG variant)
- 84%** of those PG students enrolled engaged with the module
- 46%** of students have revisited Head Start since the Welcome Week start dates

# Read all about it!

New Review of Academic Librarianship  
Volume 19, Issue 2, 2013  
Special Issue: Academic Libraries and the Student Journey

Select Language ▼  
Translator disclaimer



Academic Library Collaboration in Supporting Students Pre-Induction: The Head Start Project

DOI: 10.1080/13614533.2013.800755  
James Fraser<sup>a</sup>, Karen Shaw<sup>a</sup> & Sarah Ruston<sup>a</sup>  
Pages 125-140

Preview  
Access options

Publishing models and article dates explained  
Published online: 11 Jul 2013

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# From Head Start to MOOCs

- 'Preparing for postgraduate study' created for cohort of **Army officers** using Blackboard VLE (2012)
- **University's first MOOCs** launched November 2014 using Blackboard Open Education: Head Start Plus (levels 5/6) & Preparing for postgraduate study (L7)
- Initially **health** focused, **education** variant created 2015 for PGCE/ School Direct.
- **Enrolment data** (February 2017) L7 **731** & L5/6 **855**

# Preparation for Masters level study

Previous research (West, 2012) highlights that transition at Masters level is ***particularly important*** for students studying on a more practical course (such as counselling, nursing or CBT) and that we should not make assumptions and expect postgraduate students to arrive with the study skills necessary for M-level study (Tobell, O'Donnell and Zammit, 2010; O'Donnell et al., 2009; Watson, Johnson and Walker, 2005; Grotzer, 2005).

# Creation of resources

- Articulate Storyline
- Interactive
- Flexible format



“Key advantages of e-learning for the development of academic literacies are that it can facilitate deep learning, offers more flexible learning opportunities for students & provides instant feedback” (Wingate, 2009, p. A16)

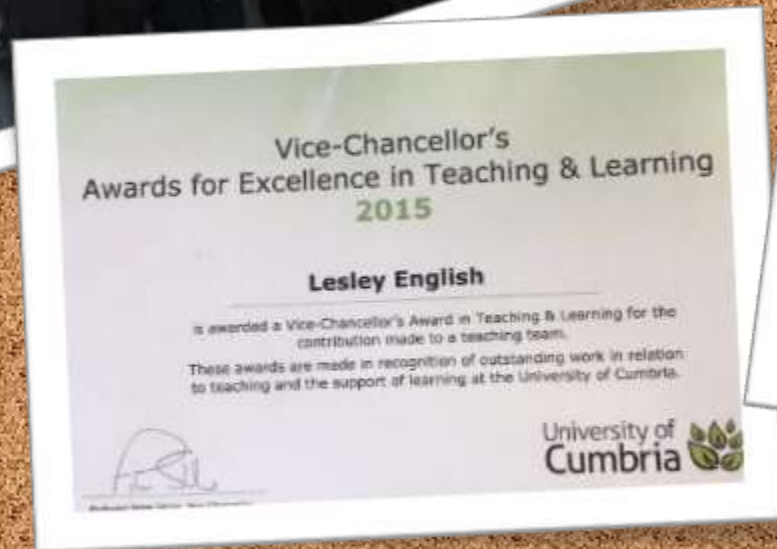
# Demo



Head Start +  
Levelling Up!



Preparing for  
Postgraduate  
Study





# Small-scale research

‘Can an online study skills module be effective in preparing non-traditional health students for a Masters level programme of study?’

Measure the study skills competencies of the students accessing the course, using a self-assessed skills audit at the start and end of the module.



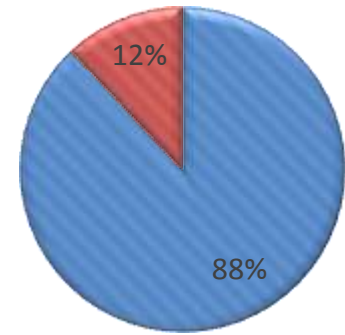
To investigate whether the students' confidence in their own study skills have increased through participation in the course.



To determine to what extent completion of the study skills module affect the student's overall pass rate on their programme of study.

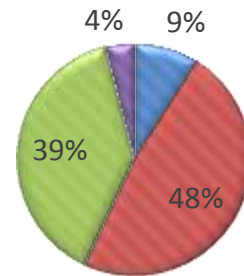
# Methods and sample size

- 77 students across 3 health programmes
- Mixed methods study which included the use of a skills audit, online questionnaire and a focus group
- Grades of the 1st summative assessment compared of those who engaged with the MOOC and those who didn't



■ Female ■ Male

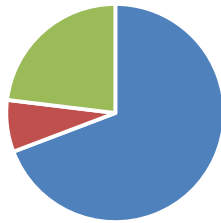
## Age categories



■ 21-30 ■ 31-40 ■ 41-50 ■ 51-60

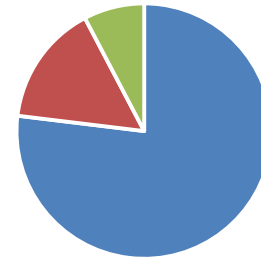
# Key findings (1)

Do you think that by accessing the MOOC you felt prepared for studying at Masters-level at the University of Cumbria?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

Do you feel that by accessing the MOOC you felt more confident about studying at Masters-level?

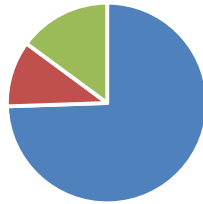


■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

*"I found [the MOOC] offered confidence in new skills and a remembering of old skills. It allowed me to undertake September with confidence and a deeper understanding of the skills I needed"*  
(Student 11)

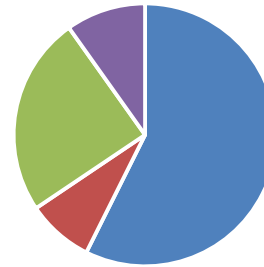
# Key findings (2)

Do you think that academic skills can successfully be delivered through a purely online course?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

What is your preferred mode of delivery e.g. online, face to face or a blended model?

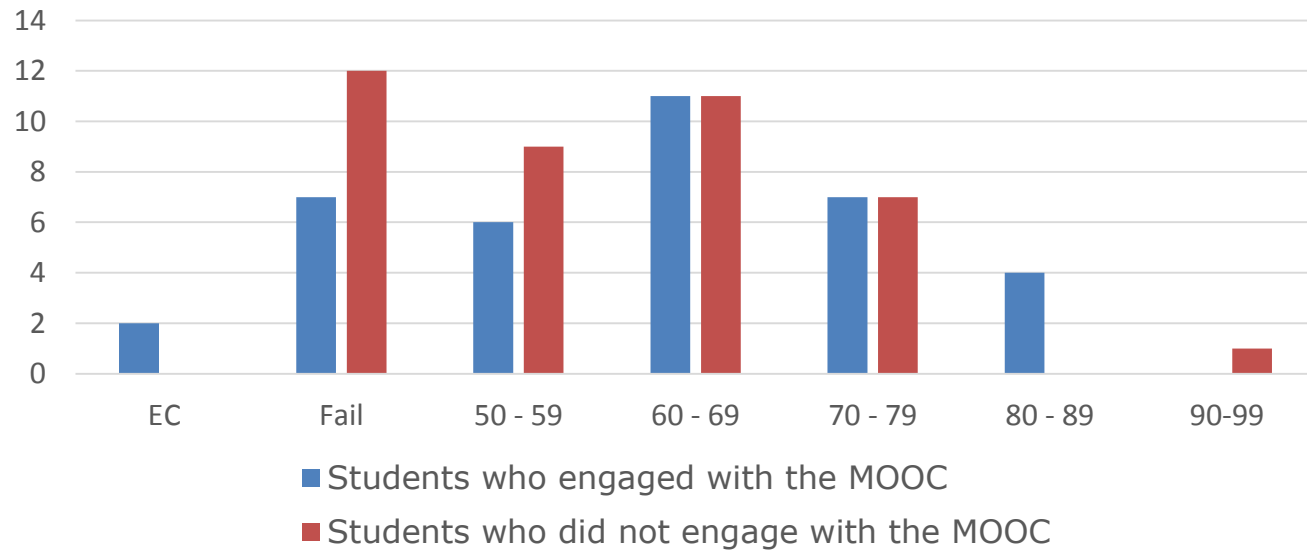


■ Online ■ Face-to-face ■ Blended ■ Not sure

Many declared that a **purely online course** can be an **effective** method of delivering study skills. However, they **emphasised the need for some sort of online forum** to be incorporated to develop an **online community of learners**.

# Key findings (3)

Comparison of grades between the students who engaged with the MOOC and those who did not



Engagement with the MOOC seems to have had a positive influence on the grades for the first summative assessment. Students were less likely to fail the assessment if they had accessed the online skills module.



# Benefits and challenges

"The MOOCs have been useful in offering guidance to those new to both Level 5/6 and Level 7 study.

Often students feel they are ready to study at a higher level and have some understanding of academic writing however, when it comes to submitting work, some have a tendency to write descriptively. Some have a basic understanding of academic writing but there are obvious mistakes in their referencing or by not being critical or analytical enough. This is when I advise them to look at the MOOCs"

Lisa Smith, Senior Lecturer in Emergency and Urgent Care (2017)

# Benefits and challenges

- **Sustainable** and **accessible** package of pre-entry support helps with recruitment, retention & achievement
- Useful not only as **pre-induction tool**, but as the student **progresses** through their course
- Individual sections **can be used separately** e.g. on skills@cumbria webpages
- Building **effective partnerships**



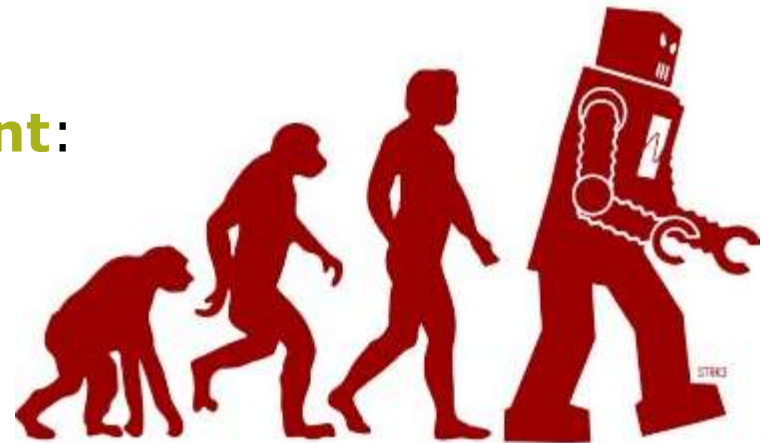
# Benefits and **challenges**

- Using **new software** & **lack of technical expertise** in using Bb/ Blackboard Open Education
- **Enrolment issues** in Bb
- **Can't be complacent** – need to regularly evaluate, update & refresh content
- **Small team** means that if there's a crisis there may be no-one to fix it!
- **Time!**



# Moving forward

- Quick survey question at the end of each section in the MOOC, to gain an **understanding of how useful each topic is** and to achieve **a badge**. Full set of badges = **self generated certificate**
- Will also help to **monitor completion** through the Grade Centre
- Two **key areas for development**:
  - Discussion boards
  - Skills audit



# Discussion board



**Encouraging a “community of online learners”**

(Fung, 2004)



# Skills audit

“The use of pre-tests can, as well as providing a method to assess the students’ increase in skill level and confidence, also motivate the students to learn”

(Verhey, 1999; Ivanitskaya *et al.*, 2008)

University of Cumbria

M-level skills audit

100% complete

Page 5: Skill area 2: Researching Information

Use the following scale to assess your experienced skills:

1. Little or no knowledge / experience
2. Some knowledge / experience & good to develop more
3. Good a bit of knowledge / experience & good to develop more
4. A significant knowledge / experience to complete the PG qualification

2 This section assesses your knowledge and experience of finding information for assignments and evaluating the sources you use.

Working broadly with the format of this question? [View in reference table](#)

	1	2	3	4
I am familiar with identifying and using library resources relevant to my subject area, including electronic resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am able to conduct searches using appropriate online resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Reference list

To access the reference list via **Google Drive** click on the link below:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B02a4M-IesMWdUVyczFxbG4tWDQ/view?usp=sharing>

