Futurelearn and MOOCs; what’s the story?

What is Futurelearn?

Futurelearn Ltd is a new company launched by the Open University to provide free online access to some of the UK’s top universities.

Online platforms delivering freely accessible university programmes were launched in North America and are known as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

Futurelearn Limited will bring together the first range of MOOCs from the UK. They will be free, open, online courses from leading UK universities, in the same place and under the same brand. The courses will be clear, simple to use and accessible.

Futurelearn will not replicate class-based learning online but reimagine it, realising the potential offered by digital technologies, allowing students to access information and to interact with each other, and the university team leading the course, in a process described as ‘social learning through doing’.

The Company will be able to draw on The Open University’s unparalleled expertise in delivering distance learning and in pioneering open education resources. These will enable Futurelearn to present a single, coherent entry point for students to the best of the UK’s online education content.

Futurelearn will increase the accessibility of higher education, opening up a wide range of new online courses and learning materials to students across the UK and in the rest of the world.

Which universities are involved in Futurelearn?

The University of Reading, along with the universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, East Anglia, Exeter, King’s College London, Lancaster, Leeds, Southampton, St Andrews, Warwick, Bath, Leicester, Nottingham and Queen’s Belfast.

When will it launch?

The first courses on Futurelearn will be available from the second half of 2013.

What programmes will be on offer?

Details of the first courses to launch are not known as yet but the University of Reading intends that its courses build on the University’s renowned teaching strength and reflect areas of research expertise.

What will studying a University of Reading MOOC course on Futurelearn be like?

The courses will typically be 6-8 weeks in length and provide a taster of studying in a specific area. It will involve a commitment of several hours per week and provide learning objectives, teaching delivered online, a level of participation and some assessment, either self-assessment or formal.
What is a MOOC?

A MOOC or Massive Open Online Course is a new departure in distance learning which offers courses made freely available online to a large number of people. It allows top teachers and researchers to reach many more people than through formal lectures on campus. There are a number of established MOOCs based around US and Canadian universities. Futurelearn will ensure top UK universities are at the forefront of development in education technology.

Who can take a course through Futurelearn?

The courses are available to everyone. There is no cost and no entry qualification.

Why would I want to take a course through Futurelearn?

The academic expertise and strength in teaching from 18 of the UK’s top institutions will be accessible in taster modules at no cost. They will allow students of all ages to get a feel for a subject, develop the knowledge of new areas or consider whether they would like to study a subject in more depth.