Chapter 6

Smaller by Design: How Good Practice Features from MOOCS can be Adapted to Enhance Core Curricula Delivery

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ABSTRACT

Much of today’s higher education landscape, particularly for vocational training providers, is market driven and highly reflexive to consumer needs. Industry and employers who require specific professional credentials have a strong influence on programme design and curriculum development. In this chapter, we will explore New Zealand’s first and only qualification for offshore and onshore professionals working with future immigrants. This qualification draws on features of open learning courses, and illustrates a pathway for education delivery that moves beyond traditional models into a 21st Century modality. The student demographic comprises a large number of mature learners, who have enrolled to gain formal credentials in their field, are moving to a new career, or may be seeking additional expertise to complement a suite of skills to offer their organisation, or as self-employed contractors/consultants. This population is a good example of lifelong learning applied to personal and professional lifestyle choices.

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INTRODUCTION

The Perspective of this Chapter

The scaling up of education into open learning courses, and the furious pace with which higher education’s largest and most prestigious organisations are leading the charge, can be alarming to the tens of thousands of smaller providers watching from the sidelines. When more than a million students can be enrolled in a single offering, few can deny that “massive open online courses” (MOOCs) are now part of the mainstream landscape. And this rolling stone keeps gathering speed: university managers and administrators in the US, but increasingly across other western nations, have been quick to build consortiums, and to partner with commercial platform providers, thereby leveraging their size advantage and increasing the gap. So how vulnerable are smaller, regional organisations to this online competition? How can these institutes protect the integrity of their qualifications against the onslaught from prestigious brands?

This chapter uses the example of a recently developed graduate course as a case study to discuss a number of strategies, which are proving highly effective in finding a middle ground. Size matters, agreed, but so do innovative problem-solving, strong stakeholder networks and a 21st Century sensibility. Many of the features of open learning courses are not restricted to that format, and recent thinking about course design - how material is presented and the interactivity with peers and teachers managed – can be addressed just as readily by courses which charge tuition, carry credit, limit enrolment for quality assurance, and record success by retention and completion, rather than subscription (Porter & Peters, 2013). MOOCs are certainly a very new phenomenon, but the developments which have made these possible have been building for a little longer, such as distance learning, online courses, social media, self-access resources, virtual communities and a global student body. The perspective we wish to put forward is one in which such transferable features can be employed outside the open learning framework, to overcome size, resource and infrastructure constraints, and harness the spirit of these winds of change, while remaining smaller, by design.

Our Setting and the Case Study Course

We are a small – medium sized regional organisation in New Zealand’s Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITP) sector, delivering certificate, diploma and undergraduate degree programmes with strong pathways established for our students to feed into partner universities for post-graduate study. A core aspect of our business is vocational and professional training; in today’s competitive market, we have to be highly responsive to the changing needs of all our stakeholders, and maintain a very close scrutiny over the quality of what we offer and the value ascribed to our qualifications.

This chapter discusses the experiences associated with the development and rollout of the Graduate Certificate in New Zealand Immigration Advice (GCNZIA). The Graduate Certificate has been designed to meet the academic and experiential requirements to gain a licence to practise as an Immigration Adviser for New Zealand post completion. As such, the qualification has a credentialing purpose as its core, and requires the on-going support and approval of the national authority, the Registrar of Licensed Immigration Advisers.

The GCNZIA qualification was designed as a programme of study available on a global basis and delivered totally online, including all the resources required to complete the programme. New Zealand