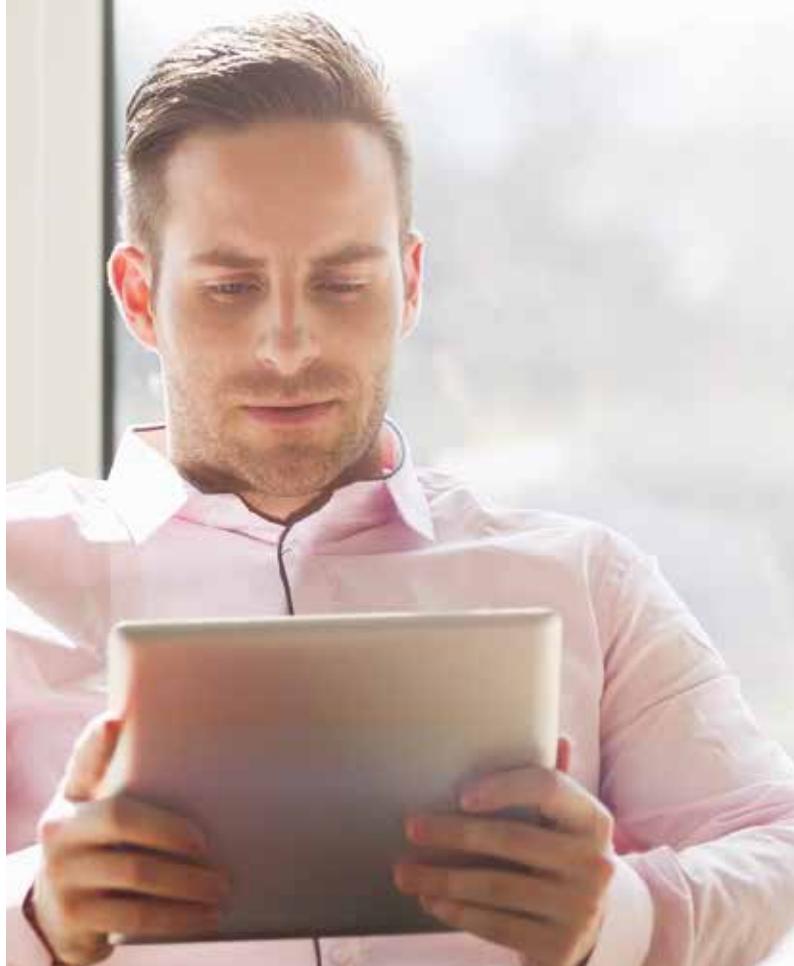


# Net gains

The EFMD Online Course Certification System.(EOCCS) management team provides an update on EOCCS' progress, lessons from its Pilot Phase and shows how EOCCS is working in practice. By **Stephanie Lambert, Anne Swanberg and Antonia Lütgens**



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**Certified course:  
Leadership and Management  
in Cross Cultural Contexts**

*“EOCCS represents an important step in increasing awareness of the specific capabilities needed to design, create and support high-quality online learning experiences. We believe that EOCCS can be an important contributor to improving engagement with online learning and raising both aspirations and achievement of quality for learning providers.”*

**Mark Fenton-O’Creivy**

Associate Dean External  
Engagement & Professor of Organisational Behaviour  
The Open University Business School

The general philosophy of EFMD accreditations – internationalisation, practical relevance and quality improvement – is firmly embedded in EOCCS, which is open to any institution, including higher-education, corporate learning organisations and public agencies.

EOCCS is different because it is fully focused on learning that is online or blended and it stands apart from other EFMD systems because it only certifies courses, or suites of courses, rather than entire programmes or institutions. This allows institutions to profile their exemplary courses in online learning but also enables the certification to remain flexible to developments in the format of online learning, such as the growing popularity of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

### The quality of online learning

In a recent online blog for Online Educa, co-author Anne Swanberg (EOCCS Director and Director of LearningLab, BI, Norway) asked two questions:

- why should we be concerned about the quality of online courses?
- can the quality of online learning be measured accurately?

In answering these, Anne focuses on developments in the MOOCs market. Online learning has become a readily available commodity with platforms and innovators, such as Coursera, EdX and FutureLearn, attracting millions of learners across the globe. While it is acknowledged that many students will not complete an entire course, there is a clear demand and a range of potential learners looking to develop new knowledge or skills through online learning.

From our experiences with the EOCCS Pioneer Institutions we have seen how small communities of learners come together physically to support one another's learning. From an organisational perspective, online learning is already incorporated into many training programmes in a variety of sectors, often with courses custom-developed "in-house".

How does one navigate this vast landscape of online learning options and opportunities? The answer may lie in pursuing courses that are able to demonstrate both high quality and a high reputation legitimated in a rapidly evolving field for those learners seeking to develop themselves.

As we gain more insight and knowledge about how we approach an online learning situation and how we interact with the learning material, it is possible to draw up some common standards for what we assume to be "good" learning experiences in an online environment.

For example, the structure of learning materials and how they are presented to learners are important quality indicators. The user interfaces also affects participants' experience, as do the length, sound and image in a video – all of which clearly indicate something about the quality of the course in general.

Standards help to describe whether quality meets expectations or rises above or falls below them. Standards also support critical and constructive methods for assessing the quality of course content. For example, is content transparent and comprehensible to a learner, backed up with scientific and didactic excellence and aligned with the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) of the course?

In the study of business it is especially important that courses provide both an up-to-date learning experience and contemporary content that recognises the realities of management in a changing global context.

Quality can further be assessed through benchmarking and self and peer assessment in these areas. EOCCS offers an international, highly regarded quality benchmark to demonstrate quality in online courses. In terms of continuous improvement, certification provides in-depth Peer Review feedback and suggestions for improvements and sustainability. And finally, EOCCS champions the peer-to-peer learning process by giving certified and applicant institutions access to best practice events and resources in a community of like-minded peers.

## EOCCS: from pilot to process

The Pilot Phase of EOCCS began in January 2016 with the final Pioneer Institutions being certified in October. The system was officially launched in November 2016.

## From pilots to pioneers

EOCCS certified 18 courses from eight renowned institutions from both the corporate and business school world during its pilot phase. These institutions have been essential to the evolution of EOCCS and have shaped many parts of the process. Originally referred to as “the pilots”, the following institutions are now considered as “Pioneer Institutions” based on the value and input they had in shaping EOCCS. They are: BI Norwegian Business School, Grenoble EM, HEC Paris, Henley Business School, Hult International Business School (including Ashridge), IE Business School, The Open University Business School and Sberbank Corporate University.

Pioneer Institutions helped shape the framework and structure of the documentation, especially the Course Self-Assessment Report (CSAR). Institutions found that the certification process was helpful and insightful as a self-reflection exercise and an opportunity to “take stock” of their online offering.

The Review Panel Stage of the process was also sharpened in this way to give the process clear focus and direction. In the spirit of EOCCS, the Review Stage takes place online via video conference. Thus far the EOCCS Management Team has been praised for the format of the online reviews in terms of simplicity.

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### Certified Courses: Finance for Managers I, Risk Management I and II

*“We are very pleased with the successful launch of EOCCS certification system which is another evidence of EFMD’s global leadership in innovations in management education. For us at Sberbank Corporate University it is a great honor and responsibility to become the first EFMD corporate member awarded EOCCS.”*

**Olga Udovichenko**

Vice-Dean, Programs Development  
Sberbank Corporate University



## EOCCS in action

The Pioneer Institutions and EOCCS Certification Board have framed a value proposition that seeks to capture the following benefits to applicant and certified courses:

### 1. International quality benchmark

- EOCCS is a demonstration of quality online learning determined by rigorous standards and Peer Review for higher education, corporate institutions and public agencies
- EOCCS is an indication of quality and can be used as part of marketing specific courses to potential learners

### 2. Continuous improvement

- The EOCCS application is an opportunity for an institution to reflect on best practices and innovative solutions in online learning for its own development
- The Peer Review process, with active experts in the field, gives institutions constructive feedback and suggestions for improvement and future growth. EOCCS also explores the sustainability of an institution’s online learning offering

### 3. Community and peer-to-peer learning

- EOCCS enables institutions to engage with a community of experts in the field during the Peer Reviews
- As an applicant or certified course member, institutions can become part of an Annual Symposium and Community of Practice reporting on new practices, sharing experiences, and exploring collective capabilities and future direction as a community
- EOCCS enhances potential for international online collaborations and partnerships
- Through EOCCS, institutions can profit from mutual learning opportunities and gain insights into the “best practices” of EFMD members





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**Certified course:  
Marketing Mix Implementation**

*“Online teaching is an important part of IE’s DNA, so participating in the certification process is not only an honour but a catalyst to continuing striving to shape the future of online education.”*

**Martin Rodriguez**  
Director of IE Publishing  
IE Business School

**Targeting different formats  
of online learning**

The Pioneer Institutions involved in the evolution of EOCCS demonstrate the all-encompassing nature of the system. Testimonials from these institutions reveal how the value proposition exists in practice.

EOCCS has certified courses from established providers of online learning in higher education over a variety of formats. For example, EOCCS has certified courses that are part of MBAs (such as the course from The Open University Business School), masters programmes (Hult International Business School, including Ashridge) and bachelors programmes (BI Norwegian Business School).

EOCCS is capable of certifying new formats of learning such as MOOCs. Henley Business School (“Managing People: Engaging Your Workforce” on FutureLearn) and Grenoble Ecole de Management (“Penser Global” on Canvas) have achieved certification for their MOOCs, both of which are stand-alone courses.

The new MOOC format of online learning also includes “suites” of courses that make up smaller certificates fit for “just-in-time” learning and allowing flexibility for the learners. EOCCS has certified such courses from IE Business School provided through Coursera.

Online learning is just as important in the business world and EOCCS is tailored to certify courses from corporate universities and institutions. HEC Paris is certified for its course “Executive Online Certificate in Corporate Finance”, which has been developed and delivered in partnership with Finance First (a provider of training to the banking and finance sector).

EOCCS has also certified three stand-alone courses from Sberbank Corporate University specifically designed for their line managers across the globe.

**Future directions for quality  
in online learning**

EOCCS, as an early mover in certifying online courses, highlights the importance of user experience in online learning quality. Furthermore, the system endeavours to support institutions in developing and delivering high-standard contemporary courses. As the market for learning on demand increases and learning becomes increasingly “bite-sized” we must ensure that standards are not compromised.

Assessors of quality in this area must keep abreast of the fast pace of development and remain flexible to changes. Anne Swanberg says: “As we are constantly moving in the direction of online delivery, it is even more important to make sure that the online learning outcome is of high quality”.

**To apply please contact the EOCCS Team at**  
[eoccs@efmdglobal.org](mailto:eoccs@efmdglobal.org)

**And visit our website:**  
[www.efmdglobal.org/eoccs](http://www.efmdglobal.org/eoccs)

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