

# British Library Sets an Example

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In a recent press announcement, the [“British Library](#) has announced its intention to join the UK’s MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) platform [FutureLearn Ltd](#), offering participants of its online courses access to the Library’s unique digitised resources. The Library will be the first non-university research institution to join the initiative, and is among five university partners...”

The press release goes on to note that [FutureLearn Ltd](#) was the first MOOC in the UK and it “was launched by the [Open University](#) last December and includes partnerships with eighteen UK universities. Existing Library digital resources will be made available on [FutureLearn](#), complementing plans for large-scale participation in online lectures and courses which are due to start later this year. The Library’s freely available digital collections include over [800 medieval manuscripts](#), [40,000 nineteenth-century books](#) and [50,000 sound recordings](#), and continue to grow each year.”

The UK has a tradition of providing government support to higher education and digital initiatives. In 1966, the Labour Party’s general election manifesto contained a commitment to establish what they were calling the University of the Air. Prime Minister Harold Wilson won re-election with an increased majority and in September 1967 his Cabinet set up a Planning Committee ‘to work out a comprehensive plan for an open university’.

Founded in 1969, the Open University was the world’s first successful distance teaching university. Open University admitted its first students – 25,000 – in January 1971. Its name Open University refers to the fact that it was wide open to anyone and did not require any prior educational qualifications. It did require students to take two foundation courses before moving on to higher level courses and eventually a Bachelor’s degree. Read more of the history of the Open University on its web site here: <http://www.open.ac.uk/about/main/the-ou-explained/history-the-ou>

Even today, under a Conservative Party government, support for the Open University, online education, and digital initiatives continues in Great Britain. Speaking in India, Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron said: “Britain boasts some of the best universities in the world. This innovative new offer led by [The Open University](#) will mean that Indian students can access some of the best teaching and learning online from their home in Mumbai or Delhi. I’m delighted that [Futurelearn](#) is expanding to include more British universities and the [British Library](#). I hope it will encourage many more Indian students to take the next step and study with a UK university.”

Through its example in joining FutureLearn, the British Library is solidifying the role of libraries in supporting the development and success of online education around the world – an example that the Poynter Library, in its own modest way, is following.

For more information, read the Library’s Press announcement: <http://pressandpolicy.bl.uk/Press-Releases/Prime-Minister-welcomes-the-growth-of-the-UK-s-mass-participation-learning-platform-FutureLearn-as-t-60d.aspx>