

Plan to reduce "Learning gap" identified for A Level students to curb drop out rate at university

## **FutureLearn Announces Beacon Schools Programme To Help Reduce Learning 'Gaps' and Provide Additional Online Resources to Teachers and Students**

LONDON, 26 June 2014: FutureLearn, the provider of free, online courses, today announces the launch of a Beacon Schools programme; a pilot intended to review how social learning technology can help close education gaps, provide additional resources to students and improve learning outcomes.

In 2013 UCAS placed a record number of students into Higher Education (465,000, an increase of 6.6% on 2012) and this number is set to increase this year with universities able to offer an additional 30,000 places\*. However 18,000 students dropped out of university in 2012, according to the most recent report from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, and research from Which? shows that 11% of students in 2013 regretted their choice of course (25,000)\*\*. Additionally universities have to invest resource in 'catch up' classes, with 60% doing so in 2012 according to an OCR study.

One of the contributing factors to drop out rates is thought to be a lack of readiness for the style of learning in universities known as the 'learning gap'. FutureLearn CEO Simon Nelson says: "We felt that by working more closely with selected schools we could understand how to help increase students' aptitude for learning both in school and in preparing for university. The beacon schools we are working with have been quick to see the potential of social learning technology, and will explore how FutureLearn's free online courses can integrate into school processes.

Five schools are working with FutureLearn in the pilot programme, selected based on their outstanding Ofsted results and proactivity of leadership around online learning opportunities. The schools are Bullers Wood School, Bromley, Langley Grammar School, Berkshire, Sir William Borlase's School, Buckinghamshire, Blessed Thomas Holford, Cheshire, Bungay High School, Suffolk.

Yvette Bellis, Acting Deputy Headteacher Bullers Wood School says:

"We are working with FutureLearn to see how we can help students gain valuable learning experiences, through free online platforms, that will help to enrich the curriculum and prepare them for university style learning. We also consider there to be a learning gap between GCSE and A Level and we feel there are opportunities to explore the value of FutureLearn courses in this context too. We've currently got 220 students all signed up to FutureLearn courses and look forward to seeing how this platform can help the way our students learn and develop."

John Constable, Head Teacher, Langley Grammar School says:

"We've seen a great uptake amongst students since the programme started, with 8 different courses being adopted by groups of teachers and students. We have all 164 of our students taking the Preparing for University course in tutor time; we're looking forward to seeing how the course can help students develop the university level critical thinking and independent learning skills that will benefit them not just at A level, but at university and for life"

Peter Holding, Head Teacher, Sir William Borlase's says:

"We see a valuable application for schools across the country. In the current context of budget cuts, FutureLearn's free courses presents an ideal resource to extend student's learning. We think that FutureLearn online courses have the potential to be a hugely valuable enrichment opportunity for Sixth Form students, particularly as they prepare for life at university. Many of our students are getting involved with courses that extend their knowledge in their chosen specialist subjects, while others are looking at courses purely for fun."

Another key area that FutureLearn will discuss within the Schools partnership will be how to help students with UCAS applications and university interviews. Harriet Jones, Director of Pre-University Skills Programme at the University of East Anglia, who devised the Preparing for University course, says: "The type of learning undertaken in university is markedly different from school. Many students feel out of their depth and ill prepared for the leap. Getting used to the discipline of self-motivated study through social learning can, we believe, significantly help with this. University applications could be improved by having a deeper knowledge of the subject area a student wishes to study, being able to demonstrate that commitment in a tangible way would be interesting to UEA and universities in general."

The schools will meet with FutureLearn at regular intervals, kicking off this summer, to discuss application of the courses and how they can be integrated. Some of the areas that will be discussed include:

- Gifted and Talented programmes
- Improving quality of UCAS applications
- Preparedness for university interviews
- Summer learning
- Enrichment programmes

FutureLearn offer a number of free courses for students who are going to university. Since launch in September 2013 over 360,000 people have completed courses, with the most subscribed course being Begin Programming: Build Your First Mobile Game. To find out more visit [www.futurelearn.com](http://www.futurelearn.com).

\* Autumn Statement 2013.

\*\*British Council 2013 Conference: Education Agents and Future of International Education; Daily Mail report on Which Survey, 11 Sept 2013

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**About FutureLearn**

FutureLearn is a social learning platform based in the UK and providing free, online courses from world-class universities. Our 38 British and international university partners join three British cultural organisations – the British Library, British Council and the British Museum – and the National Film and Television School to offer quality higher education courses to anyone with an internet connection anywhere in the world. It is wholly owned by the Open University.

The team at FutureLearn is made up of professionals from the media and digital industries. They are backed by educators and learning technologists from the Open University, which has over 40 years' experience in distance learning

#### **About the Beacon Schools Programme**

The Schools have been selected on a number of criteria including being Outstanding in their most recent Ofsted report, the proactivity of the leadership and the influence of the school in its local area. All schools involved will use FutureLearn courses.

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