Clip: Computing facilities for OU students in 1979
Video: Open Forum 42: Tomorrow's OU World
Contributor: Jim Burrows

Jim Burrows:
It was established right at the beginning when the Mathematics Foundation course M100 required practical computing facilities to introduce their students to programming. And after examining a number of possible alternatives, we decided to establish a time sharing network with study centre terminals linked through telephone lines to central computer systems. And that was quite an innovative step in 1970. Since then we have developed to provide a wide range of computing facilities for over thirty courses now in Ed Studies, Social Science, Science and Technology, as well as Mathematics. We cover areas such as survey analysis, statistical analysis, where access to a computer programme to analyse data can really relieve the student of a great deal of laborious work. We go from that through to certain modelling activities in the geography area for example, through to computer aided learning, which although it's predominantly in Social Science and Ed Studies at the moment, I suppose could be applied right across the board. In The Open University the service has been established purely to provide an undergraduate computing facility whereas in conventional universities the computer centre is largely concerned with providing a service to researchers and the undergraduates really come second best, although the situation is changing. But I would reckon that the service we provide to our undergraduates is much better than an undergraduate in a conventional university could expect, in terms of the range of software which we can offer, the sort of applications we cover, and just the access we can offer them. He's our number one customer.