OPEN FORUM 132

1988

TRANSCRIPT OF EDITED PROGRAMME
AS TRANSMITTED

PROGRAMME 132 : MAGAZINE PROGRAMME 5

Producer/Director	Kevin Newport
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Senior Cameraman	Gordon Blockley
Sound Supervisor	Martin Ward
Designer	Peter Parker
Graphic Design	Rose James
Floor Manager	Gerry Steeden
Vision Mixer	Yvonne Kelly
Make-up	Linda Burr
Film Editors	Tony Roscoe
	Paul O'Connor
Videotape Editors	Alan Kelly
	Neill Elliott
Presenters	Moira Stuart
	Chris Serle

Open Forum opening titles: 26"
plus Music (see music cue sheet)

Wipe to 2s Chris & Moira in
Studio

MS Chris

CHRIS SERLE:
Hello, it's the first weekend in June,
and that means we can welcome you to another
edition of Open Forum. This month
computing's on the agenda, we'll be looking
at how the Open University is embracing
Information Technology in it's courses, as
we move towards distance learning in the
year 2000.

MS Moira

MOIRA STUART:
Also, updates on GERBIL, the Great Education
Reform Bill, proposals to streamline
research in UK universities, the latest
news on the OU's financial situation, as well
as our regional report from the North-West
and of course, Open Access.

MS Chris

CHRIS:
But first, home computing. There are two
main issues here, lead time and cost. Let
me give you an example of lead-time. In
1971 for example the OU had to plan ahead
and decided to install teletype computer
terminals in its regional centres and make
them available at summer schools. They
were machines generally unavailable outside
the world of industry. They've served
their purpose well, but since then, there's

CU Chris

been a huge growth in the number of home
computers and a need for a broader understanding
of computing in general. Now, the OU
has to plan for the year 2000. It's seen the
need to increase the spread of computer
literacy. Consequently, many courses

CHRIS CONT:

are now coming on-stream which require access to a computer. It was for that reason to increase hands-on time that the OU introduced home computing.

The response from students has already

CU DT200 handbook
Graphic: 'Personal Computer
Requirements' (29")

been substantial, DT200 for example, an Introduction to Information Technology was launched this year. It boasts 14,000 students who are using their own home micros to link up to one another and with their tutors. M205, Fundamentals of Computing, has 3,000 students who need PCs. T102, the new Technology Foundation Course, due to start next year, expects another 4,700 students who'll also need PCs. M353, Programming and Programming Languages,

MS Chris

predicts another 1,000. It doesn't take a computer to see the scale of the problem, because computers cost money. Of course some students may want to buy their own, fortunately the University has now adopted a standard which all furture courses will be expected to use and it's arranged generous discounts on such machines. For those who can't afford even discounted prices, or choose not to buy, there's a rental pool of 2,000 machines. And some people will even be able to borrow one. But that still may not be enough, Susan Blackmore went to the wilds of Northumbria to find out more about home computing by distance learners.

SUSAN BLACKMORE:

Film insert: BBC Specially Shot:
16mm colour, sync (4'25")
MS Susan Blackmore

This film is about computers, and about Open University students who want, or need, to study computing. There are now several courses which require students to have regular and frequent access to a personal computer, but that can prove difficult for

SUSAN CONT:
students who can't afford to buy or even
to rent one. The problems are serious,
but the opportunities the computer offers
the OU can't be ignored.

GV's Northumbria

There are three courses which students
will find impossible without a PC at home,
or at least close by. DT200, an
Introduction to Imformation Technology,
M205, Fundamentals of Computing, and next
year's T102, the Technology Foundation Course.

MS Jonathan Brown

Jonathan Brown:
Our quota of new students for T102 is
213 students spread around this vast and
beautiful region. To higher micros from
the University, we've been allocated 66,
all the figures that we're working on
suggest that something like 30 percent of
students will either buy of have access
to a micro through an employer
so that leaves 70 percent. Our estimate
is there's about 100 people who want to
do T102 who will have to either buy or
acquire access by some other route, now
this is not a rich region. The economic
miracle may be happening elsewhere in the
country, but we've got something like 17 percent
of our students on financial assistance, so
we're worried about that implication.

MS Margaret Connolly

MARGARET CONNOLLY:

We bought an Amstrad. As recommended by
the OU.

SUSAN BLACKMORE:
Why did you go for buying one ?

MARGARET;
Well I thought if I was going to do three
or four years course of computing it would

GV's pc workstation

MARGARET CONT:
be cheaper in long run to buy one now, rather than keep renting, year after year.

SUSAN BLACKMORE:
And do you think that's proved a good deal ?

MARGARET :
For what it is, yes, but it has got its problems, you know, it's now as reliable as the OU made out it was going to be.

SUSAN:
What sort of problems have you faced ?

MICK GOULDING:

CU Mick Goulding

Well you get stack overload errors and the machine hangs up on you and you know there's nothing you can do with it, you've got to switch it off and start again. If you've been working at it for two or three hours it gets a bit frustrating, if you loose it all.

The difficulty is that there are so many machines on the market place which purport to be IBM compatible, which may not be entirely compatible, with the way that our software is supposed to run. It has to be said that the computing that we taught before, because of the restriction in the amount of hands-on time students had, we were really only playing lip-service to teaching computing in a true sense, now we can go further into the more complicated and difficult subject areas.

SUSAN:

3s Susan, McGuire & Connolly

This year nearly 80 percent of M205 students

SUSAN CONT:

have chosen to buy their computers, many
with special rate loans and at a substantial
discount. But things may well be difficult
next year if more than 20 percent of the
students want to rent.

MS McGuire

What course are you doing ?

DAVID MCGUIRE:

I'm doing DT200, Information Technology and
its Social Issues.

Susan:

And did you buy a computer ?

No I decided against it because I'm in
my fifth year of study with the OU, I've
only one more to go after this one, I didn't,
I decided it was unfavourable to do so.

SUSAN:

So how are you managing without one then ?

DAVID MCGUIRE:

I'm very lucky, my employers at work have
a micro and I use that one.

SUSAN:

So that means you've got to go in very
early in the morning or stay late at night ?

DAVID:

Stay late at night, lunch breaks, any spare
time basically.

SUSAN:

And does that work well ?

DAVID:

Not too bad on the particular course I'm
doing. Which is only 20 percent practical work.
6.

DAVID CONT:
So therefore it doesn't work out too badly
in my case.

JOHN NEWTON:

CU Newton

Each year more and more students are going
to require a machine, and so there's going
to be more and more pressure on the
rental pool. And politically this means
effectively that some people are saying
that we are producing courses which some
students would like to do, but can't afford
to do. I don't know what the answer is,
possibly to provide a bigger rental pool,

CU keyboard

but that requires a substantial outlay.
Our masters are asking us to produce

CU Newton

courses in this area, but not prepared to
give us the cash to do it.

SUSAN:

CU Susan

Keeping the OU really open for students
who need computers requires not only a vast
investment, but a solid commitment to
solving the inevitable problems. But it
should all be worthwhile. Long before
home computers become as common as
televisions are now, the OU will already
have taught thousands of people to use
them.

CHRIS SERLE:

MS Chris in studio

With me in the Studio to discuss the effects
of the University's home computing policy
and where it's going to in the future are

MS Jim Burrows
MS John Naughton
MS Malcolm Anderson

Jim Burrows who's the Director of Academic
Computing Services; John Naughton, T102
Course Team Chairman; and Malcolm Anderson
who's a rep. on the Academic Computing
Committee.

4s: Serle and studio guests

CHRIS CONT:

Jim, let me turn to you first, and ask you about one of the points raised in that film, and that's the question of reliability. It's a pretty awful thought, 3 hours worth of work disappearing down the drain or into thin air, or wherever it goes, just how reliable are these machines that you're recommending to people ?

CU Burrows

JIM BURROWS:

Well I think with today's technology, machines are a lot more reliable than they've been 5 or 6 years ago. Probably it's true to say that if there's going to be a problem it's going to be a problem initially with the machine in getting it functioning, but once going I would be very disappointed if there was more than perhaps a two or possibly 3 percent error rate.

MS Chris

CHRIS:

Malcolm is that a problem that you've come across with other OUSA members, or perhaps yourself with working at home ?

MS Anderson

MALCOLM ANDERSON:

Well the student generally puts the computer on the kitchen table and consequently unplugs it at various times and plugs it up to make it work. And this is where the machine becomes unreliable because you're constantly taking it to pieces and putting it together again to use it when studying.

MS Chris

CHRIS:

What's the answer to that ? John perhaps you can suggest, I mean is, people often can't the find the space to put a computer;

MS Naughton

JOHN NAUGHTON:

I think that space is actually a bigger problem for OU students than the reliability of the technology itself. I mean obviously it's exacerbated by not having space because you have to keep on dismantling the kit. But I think space is actually practically a bigger problem for many students.

CU Chris

CHRIS:

Lead-time is another big problem I suspect, or potentially, a problem in that traditionally Open University courses are expected to have a shelf-life of 8 or 10 years aren't

4s studio guests/Chris

they ? And yet with computer technology changing at the collossal rate it is now, you can't really expect a computer-based programme to survive for that long without there being some major technological change along the line. Now how do you get round that one ?

JIM BURROWS:

Well, I would agree that it's a problem. And I think first of all that University has to face up to the fact that in those courses where the computer is integral and essential, it may be unrealistic to plan again for an eight or ten year life, against that it's got to accept that if students make an investment there has to be a reasonable period of time, over which they can get some return on that investment. So I mean we've got to be looking for at least a four year period when there will be a range of courses that will run on a particular specification.

CHRIS:

So you'll promise a four year life for any programme that you're involved with, any course that you're involved with ?

BURROWS CONT:
I would have thought we've got to commit
to something like that, yes.

CHRIS:

CU Chris

Is that the best you can do John,
or can you stretch it beyond that ?

JOHN NAUGHTON:

MS John Naughton

Well I think that although it's true
that things change very quickly in the
industry it's, there is an amazing level
of stability in some respects. For example
we have standardised essentially around
an operating system not around a machine.
The operating system is MS DOS. Now MS DOS
has been around for quite a while, and
nobody that I know in the industry doesn't
think that it won't be around for a long
time to come. So that by standardising
at the software level, you do actually,
in a sense, insulate yourself to some
extent from changes in the hardware.

CHRIS:

CU Chris

So to take a positive line, if somebody
invests quite a lot of money, let's face
it, in a computer which is, which uses
MS DOS as its operating system they can
be sure that they will still be able to
run or take Open University courses, using
that computer, for the next, what, 10 years ?

JOHN NAUGHTON:

CU John Naughton

Well, perhaps 10 years is pushing it, but
given that there are millions of IBM PCs,
and MS DOS machines in the world, and
tens of millions of users of these machines,
enormous investment in software that runs
in the rest of it, they will still be
profit   in supporting MS DOS machines
for some time to come and that's what

NAUGHTON CONT:

gives us the kind of stability that we need.

It's not perfect but it's as good as we

can get in these shifting times. I think

the decision to go into home computing

is / the most significant one the University

has made, I think, since it decided to do

distance teaching. And it's significant

because the next frontier for distance

teachers and for distance learning is

how to use computers productively for

teaching and learning. Now in making

this step the OU is actually stepping over

that precipice. Because the challenge is

how are we going to use the technology to

help us combat the effects of distance? And

that's what it's for really, that's what,

that's the significance of this move.

And the problem that I see with the

current sort of discussions about home computing

is that most of these discussion focus,

almost exclusively, on the problems, sure

it's difficult, we knew it was going to be

difficult, nobody ever pretended it was

going to be easy, but what nobody sees, or

at least what never surfaces, in these

discussions, are the opportunities that

it offers us, and our students.

CHRIS:

Thank you, all three of you, very much

indeed. As we've said one of the most

innovative uses of the new technology, as

you'd expect, is on the new information

PSC Insert: Specially Shot
(by BBC Belfast) 1'58"

technology course. Last week, some students

came together for a day school, so we sent

our cameras along to see how the course is

progressing.

With over a thousand students, DT200's

computer conferencing facility is the first

on such a scale, it's even possible to make
global connections, but that's reserved
for the tutors.

NICK HEAP:

LS class

Good morning, my name is Nick Heap and I'm
chairman of DT200.

We've actually introduced the home computing
to give students the opportunity to actually
experience it, it's no good talking about
these modern systems and saying how wonderful
they all are, if in fact nobody gets a
chance to use them, so we've actually followed
a basically commercial specification, by
adopting the PC standard we are trying to
reflect what is actually happening in the
commercial world.

CHRIS:

These students have their own computers as
well as their own computer conferencing
facilities. Which, incidentally, can reduce
travel costs and replace summer school.

NICK HEAP:

MS Nick Heap

As a tutor I can actually be on at midnight
or two o clock in the morning when it
suits me. Students can actually come on
at the weekend and pickup the messages
that I've left for them during the week. And
they can see those messages, they can comment
on them, they can add new ones.

CHRIS:

WS students and computer

There are unexpected bonuses. For example,
TMA's by computer.

KATHERINE IRVING:

CU Kathering Irving

It means that from the tutors point of view
that you're able to present your work more

neatly, you're able to correct it much more quickly.

CHRIS:

The OU may think it's keeping pace with technological change, but is it ?

NICK HEAP:

You can go into a store now, there are bar codes on things, there are scanners to automatically price it and weigh it for you. The education system, I mean Britain has claimed of course that it's got one of the most advanced computer literacy programmes in the world, but nevertheless a lot of people have criticised that saying 'well it's not enough'.

CHRIS:

MS Chris

From new technology to Wordsworth. For those who don't have formal qualifications from school or college, the Open University is an ideal way to get a degree, but supposing you have the chance to study full-time and want to ? Stephen Page decided to do just that, by using his OU credits as a way in. We met him in Manchester, from where we bring you this month's Regional Report.

Regional Report musical 'sting' & graphic (0'06")

STEPHEN PAGE:

BBC Specially Shot Film insert: 16 mm colour, sync (3'46")

MS Stephen Page

Well I left school with three CSE's in English, Maths and Geography, but apart from that I didn't leave school with anything else. And then I went into work as a trainee motor mechanic, but I didn't enjoy that very much at all, so I decided to go back into studying.

STEPHEN CONT:

Well it was rather incidental how I happened
to come across the Open University because
one evening I was reading a poet called
Wordsworth and low and behold there was a
programme on Wordsworth on the OU programme
which was extremely interesting and concepts

GV's library interior/Stephen
which were put forward were very good so the
next day I went forward to the regional office
and enquired much more about the course which
was being offered on Wordsworth and they
invited me to apply to an Open University
course, which I did. Pat Herman, the senior
tutor for the regional office approached me
and suggested that would you like to apply
full-time to a conventional university ?
Well of course I've applied to five and
I've got an offer from Leeds university, an
un-conditional offer from Sterling, Southampton
has offered me a place and I'm expecting to
hear from Loughborough in the near future.

PAT HERMAN:

MS Pat Herman
I think it's important that people realise
that the Open University's job is not simply
to produce its own graduates, it's job is
to serve people's educational needs at a
higher education level, whatever they may
turn out to be. And one of these needs, a
minor one, but a very important one in the
life of the individual, is an ambition to
go into full-time higher education, a proper
ambition. If the A-level route is cut off

GV's library interior
for one reason or another, the Open University
provides an alternative route, which may
even indeed have some advantages, especially
for the very young person. A, you come to

MS Pat Herman
study with the Open University you grow up
very fast, the Open University's for adults,
there's no messing about for Open University
students, you have to work very hard,

PAT CONT:

WS Libary interior

MS Stephen

GV's libary

you're exclusively in the company of adults
who have pressing family and work responsibilities,
it matures you. One of the things that the
other universities can offer that we don't
offer is single honours degrees and if like
Stephen, you wake up one morning in love with
Wordsworth, and that all you want to do is
English Literature, then the other universities
will offer you the opportunity to do that more
than we can.

CHRIS SERLE: (V/O:)

CU Stephen

A hint of what Stephen will find at a full-time
university comes from Helen Dewsnap, she
transferred her credits to Manchester
Polytechnic, and received a BA Honours in
Sociology.

HELEN DEWSNAP:

MS Helen

There is a difference, a marked difference,
somehow with the Open University the result
that you received for your assignment, or
you know, what happened in a tutorial, was
not the most important thing, but there's
an element of competition at conventional
university that just is missing in the OU.
And something that's very important I think
to be kept missing because it encourages
people like me to, who would never have entered
a competitive field at the time I did the OU,
I mean by the time I got confident enough to
go to a conventional university I was ready
for that competition, but I certainly would
not have been before, and that is really a
major difference. And that affects everything,
how you apply yourself to your work and, you
know, the result that you get and how you
feel about yourself.

BCU Stephen	**CHRIS SERLE:** Helen is now working in the Centre for Applied Social Research at Manchester University, and Stephen has been invited to return to the OU after this degree and work as a tutor.
MS Moira	**MOIRA STUART:** Well, since that was filmed, we've heard that Stephen has accepted the offer from Leeds University and will be going there to study English and Philosophy. And we wish him lots of luck.
'Newsquest' musical 'sting' & graphic (0'06")	
MS Chris	**CHRIS SERLE:** Remember GERBIL ? No, not the furry animal but the Great Education Reform Bill, in March we brought you news of its progress through the Committee stage in the Commons.
Graphic: 'Academic Freedom Statement' (0'20")	This month it's been passed by the Lords who debated an amendment to safeguard academic freedom. The wording of Lord Jenkins amendment was 'to ensure that academic staff have freedom within the law to question and contest received wisdom , and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves within jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges.' Lord Jenkins amendment was passed by 152 votes to 126.
MS Moira	**MOIRA STUART:** Back in April we told you of the various proposals to reform UK universities research in particular the Oxburgh proposals for the earth sciences. Since our last report, 24 of 32 original earth science departments have now secured their future in some form and will be able to bid for funds from the Universities Grants Committee. Two departments were saved by the addition of a new category

Graphic: 'Oxburgh Committee'
(0'15")

MOIRA CONT:

so as well as M1 and M2, J and I, there
is now P, specially funded departments
dedicated to postgraduate teaching and research,
in a specific area. This category now
includes Reading and Newcastle, this leaves
Aston, Dundee and Strathclyde losing earth
science provision entirely through mergers
with neighbouring departments. Exeter,
Hull, Nottingham, Sheffield and Swansea
are retaining service teaching only.

MS Chris

CHRIS :

And our final update concerns the latest
on the OU financial situation. The
following courses due for launch in 1989

Graphic: 'Deferred Courses'
(0'24")

are to be deferred until 1990. A324,
Liberation and Reconstruction, Politics,
Culture and Society in France and Italy,
1943-1954. M355, Topics in Software
Engineering. T254, Stress on Materials.
T255, Materials in Manufacturing, also
E204, Purpose and Planning in the
Cirriculum will be terminated this year,
rather than 1990, as originally scheduled.
We'll keep you in touch as things develop.

'Open Access' musical 'sting'
& graphic (0'06")

Now it's time for us to listen to you.

Our first letter comes from an annoyed
Mathew Hisbent, who signs himself, OUSA
member, region 11, in Kircaldy.

Graphic: letter extracts
(in total: 1'04")

MOIRA (V/O):

I have just sat through the latest of
Open Forum on Television, and I was
appalled with the coverage of the OUSA
National Conference.

MS Chris

CHRIS:

Oh dear.

Graphic: letter extract

MOIRA : (V/O):
The programme was slick, professional, glossy and wide-awake for a Sunday morning viewing, but the conference report suggested a complete lack of understanding on the programme-makers' part as to what an OUSA conference is all about.

MS Chris

CHRIS:
OK you'd better tell us what it is about.

Graphic: letter extract

MOIRA: V/O:
Conference is about a large group of Open University students actively concerned about their education and the survival of their university, giving voice to their concerns and their hopes, and giving policy guidelines or directions to their National Executive Committee for the year ahead.

MS Chris

CHRIS:
That's a fair point, but that's what I thought we had reflected.

Graphic: letter extract

MOIRA (V/O):
What should have been shown on the television was some of the debates and arguments over controversial and crucial issues facing us today, the reasons behind the campaign '88 '89, the emergency motion on finance, the national branch constitution, the merger of BP posts within the OUSA structure, higher degrees, I could go on.

MS Chris

CHRIS:
I'm sure you could, but I think we get the point.

MOIRA:

Graphic: letter extract

The most serious criticism must be reserved
for whoever made the decision to make it
a conference report rather than a conference
programme.

CHRIS:

MS Chris

Well there is a committee which decides
the overall policy for the Open Forum
programme with representatives from
most parts of the university. In between
meetings the interpretation of policy
and overall content decision including
whether or not to cover major events
like the OUSA conference, are handled
by an executive group. Day to day
decisions including of course editorial
control are the responsibility of our
BBC producers. If we had dedicated the
whole programme to the conference, we
would not have been able to update you
on issues like the latest financial
situation, or disabled students. The
policy group has made a decision to widen
the appeal of the programme so that other
viewers as well as OU students and staff
can find out about the world of higher
education from the OU's perspective.

MOIRA:

MS Moira

Finally, there's a chance for you to give
us your comments direct in three weeks time.
When the Open University opens its doors
for open day 1988. As well as seeing how
the OU works, you can also visit our BBC
studios here in Milton Keynes and Open
Forum will be there out and about preparing
a report for next month's programme. So
why not make a date and bring the family
on Saturday 25th June and come to the OU
and BBC at Milton Keynes.

MS Chris

Music & WS Chris & Moira

CHRIS:

And that's about it for this month, so from Moira and me, goodbye.

END CREDITS ON ROLLER: (0'30")

Presenters: Chris Serle
           Moira Stuart

Reporter: Susan Blackmore

Production Assistants: Jenny Moore
                      Bridget Thomas
                      Naomi Gourevitch

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                    Carol Winton
                    Peter Champness

Series Producer: Kevin Newport

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ENDS