Transcript: Open Forum 1
TV 1972

OPEN FORUM - 1

INTRODUCTORY PROGRAMME 1972

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Section I (16mm. film)
Minicoach entering campus and driving round to the main entrance of Walton Hall.
Dr. Barber comes out of front door

Sig. Tune
FX

DR. JAMES BARBER:

Welcome to Walton Hall for the first Open Forum television programme of 1972. In this programme we're going to spend most of our time here on the campus but in future programmes we hope not only to return here but to go out to the Regions and to involve a lot of people - students and part-time and full-time members of staff. Last year, many of you wrote in to Open Forum and we were very happy to receive those letters. We hope you'll keep on writing in this year and we're going to try and include as many of your ideas and suggestions as we can in the programmes.
There will be details about writing in at the end of this programme. Today we've got a mixed bag for you - we're going to talk to the Vice Chancellor,

we're going to visit some of the operational areas of the University and particularly those that are concerned with student affairs. We're going to hear from Naomi McIntosh about some of the results of the research that she's been undertaking and, finally, I'm going to speak to Professor Asa Briggs, who is the Vice Chancellor of the University of Sussex, about the place of the Open University in the development of Higher Education. But first let's look at some of the buildings of the University. Behind me, here, is Walton Hall itself while down over on the right, we've got the Faculty Blocks, or at least some of them. There are some new buildings down there but also some that we've had up for a year or more now. And that houses Maths, the Arts and also the Social Sciences, where I work, and, temporarily, also the Library. Over here on the left we've got a building which always reminds

me of a Cunard Liner because of its brick funnels and that houses Correspondence Services and it also had Media Production in it, and you'll be visiting those areas later. But now you can go round and see some of the other buildings of the University.

NARRATOR:

These are the Science Preparation Laboratories in which which I'm assured they undertake experiments related to the courses, although all I've ever seen inside are white mice.

The members of the Science Faculty are housed in these temporary buildings. It's here that Professor Pentz and his colleagues plan their courses and devise their ingenious home experiment kits.

This is the lawn at the side of Walton Hall. There's a formal garden on the right there, but there seems to be some uncertainty about whether its going to grow herbs or roses. The building at

the back is the Catering Block, with a self service restaruant. To the right of it they're now building the new Staff Common Room, and behind it is our new show piece, the Lecture Theatre. This is for lectures and very large gatherings.

This fine, little church moves us back in time. It was one of the few buildings on site when the University arrived. Another original building was of course Walton Hall itself which is under a presevation order. This part of the building which we can see now dates from the 1830's. Here we see it a couple of years ago in the first stages of restoration. This involved, among other things, putting on a completely new roof.

The first of the new buildings we put up was a Faculty Block which as I said earlier has temporarily housed the Library and has in it three of the Faculties. The campus was more like a building

site at that time than a University. A training ground for Flanders Field. But out of all the mud and rubble came the restored Hall.

If you go inside the Hall you'd be met by this charming receptionist. On the ground floor we have Conference Rooms and the Press Office and if you follow this fine staircase you'd come to a set of offices including those of the Director of Information Services, Mr. John Greenall, the Secretary, Mr. Christodoulou and the Vice-Chancellor. It was there in his office that I spoke to Dr. Perry.

DR. JAMES BARBER:

Vice-Chancellor, looking back over our first teaching year what stands out most for you?

VICE CHANCELLOR:

Oh, I suppose the quite incredible and to some extent unexpected success of the whole venture.

VICE CHANCELLOR cont'd.

I was always sanguine but I think it's been successful beyond my best dreams.

DR. BARBER:

I was one of those who somehow thought the whole thing impossible. We can never get this off the ground. Did you ever feel that yourself?

VICE CHANCELLOR:

Oh, yes. But that was earlier - by the time it got under way I think I'd come to the conclusion that enough of it would work to make it a success. Although I always expected that some of the things wouldn't.

DR. BARBER:

I know one of the things you've said in the past is - you thought a good sign of success was when we attracted our full-time staff. What about the students and the part-time staff?

VICE CHANCELLOR:

I think that the very first sign of acceptance and respectability amongst the academic world in Britain was, of course, the full-time staff appointments because until they were made, the academic world looked on it as a joke. But I think now two more things have happened. The first was - historically, the first was the quality of the course materials which began to be seen early in this year. But the first of the last two in terms of importance was much more the student - the quality of the students which came historically later. And I think only began to be realised by the academic world in the Summer Schools because many of the teachers in the Summer Schools were teachers in conventional universities and they came up against our students. And I had people write to me and say how very nice it was to teach five hundred students this last week who wanted to learn, unlike many of my ordinary students.

DR. BARBER:

Yes, I had the same experience. I went back to Exeter, as you know, where I taught before, and I think the highlight of the year for me was the Summer Schools. And many of my colleagues had this same reaction. Heavens, the enthusiasm - they were almost overwhelmed by it! There was one lovely story of an ex-colleague who - they had a vote in the class he was taking apparently, whether they should not cut down the half hour they were given for coffee in the morning, and in fact the vote went heavily in favour of cutting it to a quarter hour. He said he'd never had an experience like this.

VICE CHANCELLOR:

Now that goes a bit far.

DR. BARBER:

Now looking to the future. We're coming into another teaching year now, what do you think you're looking forward to particularly for the future?

VICE CHANCELLOR:
Oh, I think - I think first of all, you can never judge an enterprise on the first year that it operates and so I'm very much looking to see how the Foundation Courses go in the second year of their running. We had, as you know, almost everything go wrong with them in the first year. We hope it won't go wrong again in the second year. I would like to see how it goes. I would also like to see whether the students who begin in January '72 are the same sort of people who began in January '71. I think they probably are - I think they're probably even more dedicated and more determined, in some ways. They at least know what they're in for, whereas last year's students really took us on a gamble - nobody had ever seen what we had to offer. But I do think it's important not to judge the University until two or three years have gone by and comparisons can be made.

DR. BARBER:

Yes. I think on the teaching side one of our problems is your attention - one's attention is directed to the courses you're making. We've just made one set of courses in the past, for the past year and now we're going into another set and let's hope we keep enough concentration on the first set, as it were, to make sure that they continue to be taught well.

VICE CHANCELLOR:

Well, it's vital. Nobody's said it perhaps loud enough in public but, of course, the largest number of students taking any one course is always going to be in the first year. There are always going to be more students studying the Foundation Course in Arts than are studying any second or third or fourth level course in Arts - so they are absolutely vital courses, not just in the first year that they're done but in all the years and I think they'll get better. I think that some of the

VICE CHANCELLOR cont'd.

things that were done wrong will get improved. We, as you know, we have provided a certain amount of resource to enable changes to be made in response to comments from students and comments from staff - part-time as well as full-time.

DR. BARBER:

One of the things, as you know, which is concerning me early in the New Year is this question of the Students Association. My attitude has always been that I can't imagine, because of the spread out nature of our students, that they can hope to form an Association without some help from the centre. But I've never felt that we should in any way impose an organisation on people - nor should we say to people, you must belong. What I hope we'll be able to provide is a loose framework to let us see how it develops - certainly imposing

DR. BARBER cont'd.

on nobody but offering, if we are going to have an organisation - offering a range of activities to attract in as many people as we can. But I respect the right of lots of people who say, I haven't the time or the inclination to play any part in this.

VICE CHANCELLOR:

I think that the Open University is not like any other university, I think that I look on it as a - as nearly three-hundred separate mini-campuses - using an Americanism. I really believe that students get together and staff get together at the grass roots and not in National Committees. I can see, of course, a need for a National Organisation when it comes to getting special terms for travel or for books or for this or that - concessional rates for this or that. There is point in that but I think the real importance

VICE CHANCELLOR cont'd.

of students and, indeed, total student-staff liaison - the real importance is at the Study Centre. I agree with you that you should let it grow. I think it's absolutely typical of an institution like ours that some Study Centres have got/really rattling good organisations with committees that are running things - social, educational and everything else, and others haven't - they're just dead by comparison and I think this reflects the drive of the particular group of students concerned and the interest that they have in the things that are extra-curricular. But I think it must grow from there and all the encouragement we can give to such growth the better, But I agree absolutely it can't be imposed from on top.

DR. BARBER:

I think we're very close on this. I think perhaps a bit more emphasis with me on the Centre.

DR. BARBER cont'd.

I think to be able to stimulate at the bottom we've got to provide something at the Centre but not certainly not a great, strong central organisation.

Now, you mentioned earlier on about some of the problems of the Foundation Year and it seems to me quite often they were what we call our operational areas - actually getting the stuff through and out to the students - do you think that's fair comment about the First Year that we did have problems in the operational areas?

VICE CHANCELLOR:

Oh, of course it is. Almost every system that we developed went wrong. In fact, I can't think of one that didn't go wrong. Not only did we introduce these systems without having a chance to give them a fair test in practice we also introduced them in conditions of quite abnormal stress. Here you have a University which depended utterly on, on

VICE CHANCELLOR cont'd.

postal communication between the students and the staff in the Centre - and it started - and a week after it started we had a seven week long postal strike. You see, people don't understand very well. I had letters from students three and four weeks after the postal strike was over saying, "we understand that in a postal strike you couldn't do things but it's been over for three weeks, why isn't it working now?". Well, you see we'd set up a system that would handle, I've forgotten what the figure is, four thousand letters a day and maybe it was able to handle six thousand letters a day at a push. But after a seven weeks strike, we'd got a backlog of a quarter of a million letters and you'd still got four thousand a day coming in. So you can only get rid of the backlog at a very slow rate and it takes months to catch up. And I think this very nearly

VICE CHANCELLOR cont'd.

scuppered the whole operation of the University at the beginning. But that's an excuse for part of it - there is no excuse for the rest except the speed at which the University was developed. The other systems went wrong because we had to improvise and make things work without ever having the facts or the figures or the knowledge to design the systems properly. Next year the new First Year students who come in will have the benefit of being organised on course materials which have been perhaps modified in the light of comments coming in from the First Year students and they may have been changed and improved in that way, but much more important, they'll be treated with systems that have been tried for a year and have been polished and made to work better as a result. The problem is that you've got the First Year students who were the guinea pigs in the First Year

VICE CHANCELLOR cont'd.

going forward to take Second Level courses which in turn are being tried for the first time and in this sense they go on being guinea pigs. And we can't help that either. Again, I think perhaps the systems are all right but the course materials again are being tried for the first time.

DR. BARBER:

But there'll be a problem for the systems won't there because they have to absorb a tremendous increase in the number of courses. We're not just doubling the courses next year - there are a lot of Second Level courses - there's a new Technology course - we'll have many more courses to process and get out.

VICE CHANCELLOR:

There are about twelve and a half new courses plus the four that came before, so in fact the courses go up from four to sixteen

VICE CHANCELLOR cont'd.

- that's four-fold but, of course, the number of students only doubles, so it's somewhere in between those two - the load on the system.

DR. BARBER:

Well, the Vice Chancellor has just been talking about some of the operational areas of the University and that's where we're going to visit now and to meet some of the men who are directly involved in these areas.

BRUCE McDOWELL:

This is the Open University computer which has been installed just a year now, it's working 24 hours a day, or almost that, on University business and you may wonder why we use it. First of all, the scale of our operations, there are 31,000 students registered with the University and there are a substantial number of operations to be performed with our rather complicated system of teaching.

You're all remote from us and we can't deal directly with you and the computer allows us to keep track of what each course, each of you is doing and to make sure that as far as possible we're sending out the right material that you're allocated to the right Summer School and that you are, your examinations are taken and administered and so on. Now, we in fact set up a record on magnetic tape and there are about 5 reels of these used to record the details of 31,000 students. Each reel is sometimes said to be able to accommodate the contents of something like 5 average length novels, so you can see that there's quite a provision for recording details of students and their progress through the courses. So that's one part of it. Before that, before we use the computer to administer the courses we conduct the ad issions exercise through the computer and it's only

through the use of that computer that we can actually finally bring that to a conclusion over a very brief period of time and notify each student the result. During the year we, the computer is used to er, conduct the continuous assessment programme which, as you know, is broken down into tutor marked assignments and computer marked assignments. In the first case, the computer is conducting a control and monitoring role and the individual grades which you attain are recorded by the computer and used at the end of year process. In the case of the computer marked assignments it's more direct and this device here, the document reader, is used to read the assignments which are sent in and to score them and again to record the grades. Here is a batch of them being read in. You will note that a proportion of them are rejected and some are also thrown into the late pocket. Those that are

rejected are normally thrown out by this machine arising from mistakes made by the students. Let me try and show you why this happened.

These were rejected by the computer because although the student had correctly inserted the serial number and assignment number here in ordinary human readable form they had been incorrectly filled in in the computer readable boxes at the top here and the machine knew that these numbers were either invalid or that the assignment number didn't exist. In each case we then have to look at the report produced by the computer, investigate the missing information in one of these two blocks, and complete them - insert the missing information so that they can be re-fed into the computer in an acceptable form to the machine. We've marked something like a quarter of a million of these - we've never found one that's

been actually incorrectly read by the computer.

There is a fourth category into which the forms may be put and that is the Wrecks. The forms are so crumpled probably by the handling they receive in the post that the machine cannot read them. If this happens we have to use an iron to smooth them out.

At the end of the year we go through the process of bringing all these grades together and, bringing also the examination grade into the picture and in some cases the Summer School grade and the computer is then used to identify three major categories - those who've clearly passed, those who have clearly failed, and there's a very small group of those, and the borderline group in the middle, who, when we bring together their continuous assessment and their examination may have passed or may have failed. There is another, er, two sub-categories around the distinction mark, but I won't deal

with those in any detail. No-one would like to think that their final result was determined by a computer and the role of the computer here is purely to make sure that for the borderline cases as much information as possible is available to the examining boards. The line-printer's printing out these details of borderline students. So, in a way the computer is actually allowing the examining board to give more attention to the students who are in this category than if we weren't using it.

CHRIS BATTEN:

The Department concerned with the co-ordination of Student Administration is the University Registry. The University Registry is made up with a number of major offices. We have the Admissions Office, the Student Records Office and the Student Enquiry Service, the Higher Degrees Office and the Credit

Exemptions Office. In co-ordinating the Student Adminstration we have to liaise with a large number of internal offices within the University. We have to liaise with the Summer Schools and Examinations Offices, with Correspondence Services, with Finance and Data Processing. And above all, with the twelve Regional Offices throughout the country. One of the really important offices we have is the Student Records Office.

DOUG JORDAN:

You are now actually in the Student Records Office. You've seen the Computer Room, Data Processing, and it's in this office that we clothe the rather bare facts and figures that the computer boys give us. For instance, these are tutor-marked assignments which the staff are sorting. They are, in fact, just a bare figure on the computer and it's rather more here, we actually have the full details of the grading the student receives and the remarks of his Counsellor and his Tutor. In addition, we maintain

DOUG JORDAN (Cont.)

records from the day the student joins the University, his original application form is maintained here, his provisional registration form, his conditional registration form, that is, the student who is already registered and is giving us some idea what he wants to do next year, his sponsorship forms and all his correspondence. And visitors quite frequently expect a mass of steel corridors when in actual fact if we had 30,000 files, which is what we'd need for all our students, we just wouldn't be able to cope. We put everything on micro-film. Every letter, every form, every note that comes into the office is fed into the camera. It is reduced to the size of a postage stamp. It is then inserted by mechanical means into one of these jackets and when any reference is required to any correspondence from the student, this jacket is taken out of the file and can be read on a special viewer. I would emphasise here that this is very confidential. Only Student Records staff are allowed to see them and, of course, Tutors or Counsellors. But it is only University staff. And, of course, we have contact with our Regional Offices. The information that is held on file here is also held in the Region and

DOUG JORDAN (Cont.)

vice-versa. If they have a letter about a student, they send it to us.

CHRIS BATTEN

In a residential university if a student has a query of an administrative nature, he would go along to one of the administrative offices and sort the query out, so to speak, over the counter. None of our students, or very few of them, are able to do this, and so we have what is called a Student Enquiry Service.

(W/T Telephone ringing)

WOMAN ANSWERING PHONE

Student Enquiry Service. If you give me your name and address I'll arrange for our copy of the Guide for Applicants to be forwarded to you.

ELEANOR MILBURN

The Student Enquiry Service deals with about 400 enquiries a day, almost all of them letters, some by phone. We don't, of course, answer all the letters ourselves, we probably answer about 100 letters each day or try to keep up to that level. The remainder is sent round to other specific offices, for example, exams, Student Records, some of the letters may not actually need replies, they will be people

ELEANOR MILBURN (Cont.)

sending back letters, such as the indemnity kit letter that they've actually signed and so they don't need acknowledgement. We send others down to Admissions, where they're just perhaps asking for a Guide for Applicants and they will send the Guide off and perhaps a standard acknowledgement form.

(W/T machinery).

But here we try and deal with the problem enquiries for people who require a personal letter because they're asking perhaps about six different things in the same letter. One of the most important things is to put clearly on every letter your name, serial number and address. If you're already a registered student, of course, it's helpful to include the numbers of the courses you're studying. This saves us a tremendous lot of time checking our files. Of course, a lot of our information comes to us from Student Records, particularly in relation to students who are already registered for courses. Starting this year we have an answering service here at Walton Hall. We recognise that most of our students are out at work and so we thought it useful to have one of these machines which means that people can ring up, it's a Bletchley number, and record their enquiry after office hours and at the weekends, and then they'll get a letter back in reply from us here in the Student Enquiry Service.

TOM ROBERTSON

The Correspondence Services unit of the University is responsible for ensuring that all mailings to students and tutors reach them in good time. Naturally, everything depends on very accurate scheduling. We provide mailing schedules to many people in the, in the University, certainly all user departments to our Regional Offices so that everybody has information about mailings that are due to be sent out. We do, of course, send these to the computer because our labels for mailing are produced by the computer. Now we use these labels on our K.D.G. addressing machine. They go on in multi-columnar form. The columns are split into single columns and then into single labels, and the single labels are married up with the envelopes. These can come off the machine at the rate of up to 6,000 an hour, but our normal operating speed is about three and a half thousand. Now we have controls, naturally, we know how many students we have for a particular course when the computer produces labels, they say here you are, here are 5,491 labels, and we check that that number of envelopes has been labelled on our KDG upon which there is a counter. By the same token, after the labelled envelopes have been taken to our Inserting Machine, we have a check at the end to ensure that the correct

TOM ROBERTSON (Cont.)

number of packages have been filled. Now, that machine can fill up to 9 separate inserts at any one time, from books of $\frac{3}{8}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick down to single sheet inserts. The machine has certain constraints, one of which is that it cannot enclose a cumulative total thickness of more than $\frac{3}{4}$". In any event, we send our correspondence packages by second-class mail, there is a weight limit of a pound-and-a-half. So, having labelled all the packages in the normal course of events, these would be trollied through to the Post Room, where we have a team of Post Office sorters working on our premises. This means to say that they can sort all the University's mail correspondence packages here, bag them and convey them right to Bletchley Station so that we do not, in fact, use the Bletchley sorting office at all.

SECTION II (In Studio)

Mrs. McIntosh (seated at desk)

Naomi McIntosh:

Well, it's clearly appropriate for me to follow on afterw[illegible] Tom Robertson because he's the man who sends out all my questionnaires to you and everybody keeps on asking me, what about the answers to these questionnaires, where are they, who are the students? So I'm going to try and tell you some of the answers. And the first thing, and one of the important things, is the question of sex. What is the male/female split - have we got enough women? Well looking at this, you'll see that last year we didn't have enough women - the split was 74/26. I'm hoping it's going to be better this year because certainly more women applied and we had 33% of women applicants and so maybe we'll regress the balance.

Coming onto age, you'll see that we have a few very mature students. There's one charming gentleman in Cardiff aged 76 who writes to me very regularly. The largest number of you are in fact in the late twenties and early thirties. Again this year it may change because the largest

number of applicants for 1972 are in the younger twenty age group. Occupation. Well the thing that's discussed most is the occupation of the students and everybody says, what about the social class structure of the Open University? And the first thing I want to say quite clearly is that we do not know the social class structure of the Open University. We asked you to categorize yourselves by your occupation. And those of you who are housewives for example, have said just that. Looking at some of the groups we've got, of course, we have a large group of people from education, and they are not just teachers - they include Youth Leaders, they include Education Administrators and so on. In 1972 again there's an interesting change. This figure has dropped from 40% to 30% in the applications for next year. Looking at some of the other groups - Technical personnel, for example. Well what does this include? It includes Draughtsmen.

It includes Lab. Assistants. It includes Systems Analysts, Computer Programmers. Some of them really don't like to think they're not qualified but really they're busy studying the Maths course. I'm going down looking at clerical and office workers - this is where a large number of the women are found. There is one other point which again we thought you'd be interested in, which is, for those of you who haven't any formal educational qualifications - have you in fact had any other educational experience? And so we asked you about your previous part-time educational experience. And you'll see from this that a remarkably high number of you - 80% or more, have had some form or other of part-time educational experience. Some of these are small groups - for example Block Release. And a large group of you who've been to some sort of Evening Institute or class. But the important thing is, that only 20% of you had not had any form of part-time educational experience

before. And there's one particularly interesting group for me because my very first job when I arrived at the Open University was to research into the Preparatory Courses, which is that those of for you who studied the Preparatory Courses - about 2,000 of you - over 90% of you stayed through from the provisional registration period to the final registration period and this was far higher than very many of the other groups - about 80% overall stayed through to this time.

And this brings me to my next overall graph, which is to show you just how you all progressed this year. You'll see that the pattern varies from Faculty to Faculty but I want first to look at the beginning of the graph - the period from January to May, which is what we called our provisional registration period and we don't count this point of time in our final figures. The reason for this is that we wanted to give you a chance to test the system out and decide whether or not it was right for you. So in May last year and in April this year

in 1972 you choose whether or not to finally register. And the significant point about this is that once you're finally registered you'll see that the pattern staying in is very stable. And finally of course, as many of you will have seen in the press over the last weeks, I just thought I would show you again the numbers who obtained credits in our first year, last year. And so there we have it - Humanities 85.6%, Social Science 80.5%, Science 70.5%, Mathematics 59.9%.

But I'd like to look now in more detail at one or two of the actual questionnaires that you've been filling in. One of the longest ones you all got at the beginning and very many of you - about 90% of you sent back - served two purposes - both very short-term immediate purposes and longer term purposes. The short-term one is what I want to concentrate on today. Everybody was immediately concerned to know whether or not students would be able to watch the television programmes. So the fundamental fact was would you get back from work to your house in time to watch the

programmes. And you can see from this graph that it isn't until about 6.30 that as many as 80% of you do in fact arrive home. It's not as bad as it sounds because there is of course a second chance to watch the programme at the weekend and many of you do in fact watch at the weekend. The other available time we have - the second graph, which we're going to have to use in the future is nothing like as popular - and I asked you about this too - and if you look again you'll see that you have to put a programme out at 7.30 in the morning to get as many of you as 80% at home. So this poses us with some quite serious problems which we're working on now.

The other important questionnaire that which we sent to a lot of you - to in fact to one in three of you, we've called it 'The Course Unit Report Form' we ask you regularly week by week to let us know how you were studying, to let us know the number of hours you were spending, the difficulty you found in the unit.

In particular we ask you whether you actually managed to watch the television components of this unit. Question 6 for example says, 'When did you watch it? Where did you watch it? How useful did you find it? And how interesting did you find it?"
What was quite amazing was the number of you who actually managed to watch the programmes. Science you will see is pretty consistently the highest. This is not surprising because we did say that it was compulsory for Science students to watch the television and that we really believed they wouldn't manage it without it. Social Science comes next. Followed by Maths, Humanities. The gap in the graph is not because the programmeswere suddenly bad but because that was when we hit Easter Week and the programmes went out of phase.
The other interesting thing about Science is that far more students watched/twice. Coming onto Radio listening / you'll see again and you'll that I've kept the graph from between 70% to 100%, so the figures

listening were very high. Coming on again you'll see a pattern of much more varied use. You'll see one particular peak with a Radio programme on Biology, which must have gladdened the heart of Professor Rose, where 96% of people listened to it. But the pattern of Radio listening is more varied and reflects the different use of Radio by the Faculties. One other very, very important fact we found out from these forms - you'll see I've given you examples over ten weeks of the year from units 9 to units 18 before the Summer School period hit us, is that we asked all of you how long you had been studying each week. Starting with Social Science which had an average of 11.3 hours over the whole of this particular series of weeks, you'll see that their level was very constant, Unit 18 only was a bit low. Going onto Arts you'll see that the pattern was in fact much more varied. Units 13 and 14 were less than nine hours - these were music units. Whereas unit 17 and 18 were very much higher. These were the

units which will be familiar to some of you on Socrates and I'm very ignorant about Socrates myself. Maths was consistently rather more heavily loaded, the average overall was 13.1 hours and Science was in the first year the most heavily loaded of all. The average over those weeks was 14.8 hours. I think the significant point to make about this in particular is that it included some sorts of time that we hadn't really planned for. Sorts of time like packing and re-packing the experimental kit when some of you had to put it away in a cupboard and lock it up so the children couldn't get at it. But the most important point was that Science has immediately made decisions to change quite a number of their units for this year. Unit 10 for example where forty percent of you spent over eighteen hours on that week has now been made a unit to split over two weeks, over weeks 10 to 11. And unit 13 has now been made optional

and doesn't need to be done. And certain other specific ways in which work load in the Science course has been reduced to cut down this average, because clearly although we aimed at ten hours we didn't know how close you were going to get to it - we didn't expect students to be studying to be committing so much of their time.

There's one final thing you might be interested in which I'd like to show you which is again we asked on the form - we asked how many of you went to Study Centres each week. As you know we have two hundred Study Centres or so over the country. They aren't a compulsory piece of the system - they are a help for you, available if you can get to them and if you want to get to them and if you need to go for help. Taking a crude average over the Faculties, you'll see that around 40% to 50% or so said in any one week that they went. But this is an example where averages are very misleading and the highest attendance and the lowest

attendance were extremely different. The highest attendance in any Faculty went up to 60% to 70% - this was in fact in the early weeks of the postal strike when people were going to pick up their packages. And the lowest attendance came I think towards the end of the year when perhaps you were too busy revising. But it is an indication of the resource that there is available for you if you want it and what we want to know is how much you are in fact going to use it. So there you are, that's an idea of the sort of information and the sort of way we're using it. As with all research, every bit of research throws up some answers but every time it throws up yet more questions so as I write you more pieces of paper and as I ask you more questions, please don't throw them in the waste paper basket but do sent them back to us because as you'll gatherfrom this, we will use them.

DR. BARBER:

So far in this programme we've been looking inward at ourselves in the Open University - peering hard as it were at our own navel. But as I said at the beginning we also want to try to set the Open University in the context of the development of Higher Education and in this we've got the help of Professor Asa Briggs. Professor Briggs, can I start by suggesting some ideas that came out from one of the Reith Lectures of Richard Hoggart. He talked about the expansion of Higher Education about a decade ago which included your own University, which was a new one at that time and he said of that expansion that it was very well achieved in the sense that you managed to absorb large numbers of people. That in doing this, many of the fundamental questions about the development of Higher Education just weren't asked.

PROF. BRIGGS

I don't think I would entirely agree with Richard Hoggat on that. I think that in a new University ten years ago many of the fundamental questions were being asked. Youwere forced to ask them. We certainly asked them at Sussex in 1960/61. What kind of a University should you produce in the 20th Century? What is the changing relationship between the University and the Community? Should you concentrate on one age group? Should you alter the curriculum? What is the relationship between General Education, and Specialist Education? These were the questions that we asked. I don't think they had been asked very profoundly in England before and I don't think all Universities in England ask them now, but one of the advantages of being in a new University, as the Open University itself realizes of course, is that you are forced into asking questions the answers to which people usually take for granted in existing institutions.

MR. BARBER

But the answers you came up with the expansion of Universities at that stage, seem to me in many ways, yes you took in many more numbers but the characteristics that you developed are very close to those of other Universities. You may have asked the questions but the answers may have been rather conventional.

PROF. BRIGGS

No I don't think I would really agree with that either I think that we never envisaged our own role in my own University for example of simply increasing numbers and indeed over the last ten years numbers have increased in the older Universities far more of course than they have increased in the all the new ones put together. What we did askwere questions about the nature of University organization in the curriculum and for example we made a most radical break with most Universities by getting the departments

altogether which is a fundamental break and substituting for departments schools of study. We got rid of single subject honours degrees. There are no single subject honours degrees and we got the idea of the degrees rather like Open University Degrees in this sense with building blocks, with some major courses, with related courses, and like you we were forced to ask some very interesting questions about what you do with people in the first year of University. When you've only got students in thier first year of course you may take the first year more seriously than you do later on, but we asked these questions, and in my view the significance of the creation of seven new Universities was this. That they made people think far more about the dynamics of the University System. If you had created one new University it would have been incremental to the system but by creating seven new Universities you really, I think altered the way in which the system worked.

I don't think this is entirely a matter of numbers at all eh, and I never really had a great deal of sympathy personally with those new Universities which set themselves ludicrously high targets in terms of numbers recognising that within the economics of University expansion in England those targets were impossible to attain.

DR. BARBER

This is a dramatically different situation with our own in which from the beginning we went for large numbers. I sometimes wonder about the imagery of whether we are'nt rather like a reforming order in the old medieval church, rather like the Friars, perhaps, we've gone out to take the faith outside the institutions of what was then the Church in this analogy, but with the Universities in the past. Now we've gone out and we've taken it to very large numbers of people much larger than any other single University and this in itself is going to have

a change.

PROF. BRIGGS

Oh indeed I'm with you all the way on than I mean I think that society's changing so fast that it is essential to get a totally different conception of Education in the community from that which regarded as being segregated in particular categories of institutions called Universities and I think as we go forward into the future the relationship between the home and the school, Institutions of Higher Education will be transformed and I think you're at the beginning of something here which is really quite different eh but then eh I sometimes think that eh your idea of eh spreading education is related to certain aspects of the English tradition. I was for nine years the President of the Workers Educational Association in this Country and to me it was perfectly natural and understandable that you would be involved in teaching and

learning processes with adults eh at a University standard of work. and therefore the Open University to me, while it points the way to the future socially and culturally is also related to the past in terms of an existing tradition which goes back a very long way into our history.

DR. BARBER .

Yes, I'd accept that. There are also some worries that people have which I guess you won't share as you have been connected with this for some time, but we do have asked of us, 'well what about employment prospects. Because we already got too many graduates, what's going to happen to the Society with so many graduates they'll be disatisfied'.

PROG. BRIGGS

Well I think that this is a cause for some worry at the present time, it has been only a very recent cause of worry we're still, in England, eh living in a country where far fewer people get

University Degrees than in most countries in the world and talking about the expansion of the last ten years, many other countries in Europe have got far ahead of us. My own view is that eh educational purposes eh are very much related to social needs and they change as society changes but in the last resort Educational Development on the part of the individual must be looked at as development in his interests as well as in the interests of the society and I would be in favour of eh widening the range of educational/opportunity and changing the openness of the system even if it did'nt lead to improvements in employment/prospects for the people who are going through it. I don't think any University Graduate, including a Graduate of the Open University, can believe in the 20th century that automatically the acquisition of a University Degree provides him with a passport for life, or indeed necessarily gives him a visa with more than very limited validity.

I think that u.n the community depends upon qualities other than the qualities which are given by a University Degree; It depends upon qualities of personality, leadership, attitudes, motivation-all kinds of other things and the University Degree is merely one bit of the set of qualifications which an individual has got at his disposal. A very important one but not the only one.

DR. BARBER

I think in some ways our students may have a pull in this because they have shown, or they will when they get their degrees, they'll have shown the ability to reach this standard of academic achievement and they have done it in circumstances which demands a great deal of character of them. So in that I think they may have a pull if we can get.....

PROF. BRIGGS

They've certainly been tough and I, looking at the figures from outside I

am amazed really at the amount of time which individual students are able to put in in a week eh it may be too much in relation to the balance of life and work over a period of time to expect people to put in much more than ten hours a week which I think is a figure you had in your mind eh I but at the same time, clearly the motivation of older people, who have had some experience of life, going forward then to study intensely, seriously in a committed way, is greater than it is for many people at the age of seventeen who more or less automatically go on from school if they are reasonably clever thinking that the University will be an natural destination for them. I don't really ever regard I'm the first person in my family ever to have a University Education. I've never regarded a University as a place to which anybody should go automatically I think there must be an element of genuine choice and there must be some real motivation there and I think one of the problems that other Universities

apart from yourself face is that while we can measure ability at the age of seventeen to some extent, which is one of the criteria for getting into a University at that age, we find it very difficult indeed to have any really good test of motivation at that age. And the result is that I've always believed that there should be institutions in society which are dealing with adults. And I would also hope for that matter to - even the so called conventional Universities - and there is a pretty wide range of variety in them - that they should not think that their only task in society is to deal with the seventeen to twenty age group.

DR. BARBER

I think of course in this whole area we're talking about, social expectations and things like this. For some people, if you go to University it leads you into a particular range of jobs. I think this must change and it is

changing. But equally this expectation of I should go to University about a particular age period - that I'm right about eighteen to twenty-two and if I don't make it then, I can't. Well this is another, of course, of the barriers which we are breaking down. But from what you've said I've guessed you'd be sympathetic perhaps to an even more open situation in which people could drop in perhaps to an Institution like yourselves at Sussex or other Universities and perhaps then come and do some work with us as well and drop in and out at various stages of life and also be able to exchange the systems.

PROF. BRIGGS:

I would certainly be in favour of, in a University like my own, of getting rid of the idea altogether that we're concerned exclusively with one age group. Indeed we've tried to do this, for example, through a mature entrance scheme and bringing in

people older than the average age. And I'm very much in favour of people in their forties, /fifties having the chance of spending a year in University surroundings. I think the Open University obviously has got a place within the pattern - linking up in all sorts of ways with other agencies. I think one of the main problems which arises in relation to the younger age group - now it doesn't seem to me to be an insuperable problem, - is that of course there is a diversity of University institutions and they're diverse not only in their organisation or their location or their size, but they're also diverse in their curriculum and I don't myself believe that we've yet reached a stage in terms of the development of the carriculum where there is only one way of approaching a subject. Nor do I believe that we've got to the stage where it would be possible for all the Universities in this country to sit down and produce a list of

nine-hundred and ninety-nine different courses all neatly numbered and say, these provide automatic equivalencs wherever you want to go. I you go to another place then you've already got this equivalent. But I think it is essential that there should be mobility in the system between Polytechnics and Universities. Between Colleges of Education and Universities. The Open University and the other Universities. I'm going back to Richard Hogarts'remarks - I was very disappointed that he made no reference to the Open University at all in his account of the way in which the University situation is changing in this country. I think he's right to argue that in this country there is no built-in tendancy for expanding higher education all the way along the line as there is in America. But I think he's wrong in failing to see the significance of the Open University or indeed some of the developments that have taken place in other Universities

during the course of the last few years.

DR. BARBER:

I think on this what we agree that we want to retain the variety that you can offer in higher education because there is no one route - I think we would all accept that - and yet at the same time be able to marry the various pieces together.

PROF. BRIGGS:

Yes. I entirely agree. I think one thing you've been forced to do which interests me very much, again looking at it from outside, is that in working out your courses and providing different kinds of materials for following them - television materials, verbal materials, kits and the rest of it, you've been forced to think about three things which sometimes get taken for granted. First of all you've been forced to think about the order in which things are learned. And I think this is - it is very valuable for academics that we should

be forced to ask questions about the order. Even if you may not entirely agree about them and you may change it from year to year. Secondly I think you are being forced to ask questions about the rate at which people learn which seems to me to be of fundamental importance. Again it's taken for granted in schools and Universities, far too frequently you've got to deal with learning rates in a standardised way. And then thirdly, I think that inside a University it is very easy to have a lack of fundamental discussion about the nature of the subject and the response of people to studying a subject. I wouldn't say that this is true in all Universities or in the best departments or schools of Universities. It's certainly true in many casesthat far too frequently the way in which a subject has been broken down and studied, the rationale for doing it really have never been subjected to any kind of examination. You've really had to ask for example in

history, what history is about and why people want to study it and what is its relationship to literature and economics and so on? Fundamental questions which I think are well revealed in some of the kit materials which you've produced.

DR. BARBER:

Professor Briggs, thank you very much.

In this programme we've mentioned a couple of ways of contacting the Open University - the Student Enquiry Service. And we've also mentioned right at the beginning, I said about contacting Open Forum. Well there will be announcements about the way you can do this immediately after this programme.