PhD Pioneers:
The Living Experiences of The Open University's First PhD Graduates

Oral History interview transcript

Name of Interviewee: **Professor Jeff Haywood**
Interviewed by: **Elizabeth Currie**
Date of interview: **23/03/2021**

Important
The content of oral history interviews is personal, experiential and interpretive, relying on the memories, perceptions and opinions of individuals. While all reasonable attempts are made to avoid inaccuracy, interviews should not be understood as statements of fact or opinion endorsed by The Open University.

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it.

In some cases, interviewees may have made changes to the transcript.

Personal/sensitive information regarding individuals who may be living has been removed from transcripts where necessary.

This is Liz Currie visiting researcher for The Open University on 23rd March 2021 recording for the Looking Back, the first OU PhD's project, and I'm going to ask my interviewee today to introduce himself.

Hi, I'm Emeritus Professor Jeff Haywood. I am recently retired from the University of Edinburgh where I was, well two different senior roles, Professor in the School of Education, but I was also Vice Principal with responsibility for IT, the library and digital education.

And what was your PhD topic?

My PhD topic, and I can't remember the exact title because we are talking about a long time ago, it was Biochemical Correlates of Imprinting in Day Old Chicks.

That's fab, thank you very much. So we're going to start and I'm going to ask you the first question. So the first couple of questions about your childhood and your early education, so can you tell me about the area you were born and where you grew up?

Yeah well you can tell I come from the north of England because I've never entirely lost my Yorkshire accent, despite having lived in Scotland for 40-odd years. Anyway, but it was the dirty industrial bit, not the nice green Dales bit, so this was rundown and impoverished Bradford. And I went to the standard state school system but then in those days of course there were 11 pluses and there were entrance exams and I got a scholarship to go to Bradford Grammar School which was a direct grant school. And I was the first of my family really to go into education beyond the age of 14 or 15 or whatever. Not sure there's a lot to say about that, my school gave me a very good education and in the end they threw me out because we disagreed vehemently about the ethos of the 1960s.

What happened then when you say they threw you out because you disagreed?

We agreed to differ. We agreed to go our separate ways.

So what was your ethos?

Well, we were, you know, it's the Bob Dylan stuff, times they are a changing and the school was nowhere near changing, so. So I spent quite a lot of my teen years, I was quite social but I spent a lot of my teen years reading. I read a load of science fiction and I read modern novels. I was a Jack Kerouac addict. And I guess the music and the literature and the films, even in impoverished Bradford, there was an art cinema that showed imported French and Italian films that technically you were supposed to be 18 to go and see, but nobody ever took any notice. And so I was actually very aware of what the world was doing and I was conscious I suppose that I was part of a changed generation. Anyway my school didn't think that's what its senior pupils should be about, so we went our different ways.

And where did you go after that?

I actually worked for a year on the out of town buses, so I was a bus conductor - which was great because it taught me about getting up at four o'clock in the morning and working until one o'clock in the morning and all of that, it was a useful education. I also made a load of money.

And were any of your family familiar with higher education?

No. No, no. I'd had one uncle although he wasn't very close to the family and didn't live anywhere nearby who had gone to Durham a long time ago. But he'd had no influence really on the part of the family that I was in and the settings in which I was brought up.

OK. So from what you're saying there's a little bit of time between when you finished at school and presumably we'll talk about your undergraduate education as well, but that time between was that the buses was what you did?

Yeah it was working and growing up, I suppose, stopping being a schoolboy and becoming a long haired child of the ‘60s, doing all those things, music and all of that.

And how long was that for roughly?

Well, the rebelliousness has never left me, but there was a year and a half probably between end of school and university. Well the system there was different because it was an accelerated A-level programme and so you were a year ahead of your contemporaries in academic terms when you did you’re A-levels. So leaving school a year or so early didn’t actually really have an academic impact because you’d already done all your exams at the end of, the year before. You didn’t take the O-levels, you only took a few O-levels, it was accelerated. So it didn’t make me older when I started university, I was the same age.

OK, well let’s move on to your university education then. So what did you study as an undergraduate?

I came to Edinburgh and I studied biochemistry and the choice of that also came out of that, and we’ll come back to this, that sort of awareness of what was changing in the world. I read a lot of science fiction, when I was a little kid I wanted to either be an astronaut or a nuclear physicist, and this is the 1950s, yeah. So I don’t think other kids mostly, well apart from one or two who understood what a nuclear physicist was and so you could play games about nuclear reactors. But it was one of those things that was on the leading edge of what people were conscious of in a general sense and so I knew I didn’t want to do straightforward plain boring chemistry, and I wanted to do something where you could see a new science coming through, and so biochemistry was the thing that I chose to do. And then the only other stipulation was it needed to be a long way from home, sorry a long way from Bradford really to be fair, a long way from Bradford.

Why was that…?

Because I wanted to go to a big city where I felt things were, there were a lot more opportunities available, a lot more cultural opportunities, social opportunities just not rundown and depressed.

And why did you decide to go to be an undergraduate?

A lot of that, I mean I think as for many kids now it was less true then, but the school that I went to the majority of kids actually went to university. It was normal there, because it was a highly selective school and blah-blah-blah. And so it wasn't by any means unusual to do it. And of course you were getting the expansion of the universities in the '60s, at around that time, and so the idea that there were universities, they were beginning to pop up all over the place. So it was on the cusp of them being the small number of elite universities and a larger number of universities that provided a more mass education. But within my school it was if you were academically strong then you went to university, and ideally from that perspective you went to Oxford or Cambridge. But rebellious people don't go to Oxford and Cambridge.

So what did your family think about you going on to university?

They were happy with that. It wasn't an alien thing, as I said, I had one uncle who'd done it and I suppose that other members of my family would have done it except that they didn't get the opportunities and the schooling and universities were much smaller in number, it was a very middle class thing to do. Middle or upper class in fact thing to do and my family wasn't, so you got jobs.

So as you know we're focusing on your PhD study. So it feels a bit quick I know, but we'll move on briefly to PhD, so why did you decide to do a PhD?

I think really, well partly because it was a very common thing for undergraduates coming out of Edinburgh to do. And actually still is fairly common. And also

because in my final undergraduate year I got really interested in research, and I also got interested in research in the developing areas of biochemistry as opposed to some of the fairly long lived traditional stuff, structures of enzymes. And there's a lot of long lived biochemical research which is sort of, pedestrian's a bit unfair, but it was the stuff that everybody did. And then you could see that there were areas where there were significant change coming through and so I was attracted to those, I was interested in the idea of doing research. It was not an unusual thing to do. And in those days the number of scholarships available to do PhDs versus the number of people wanting to do it was actually not bad. So it wasn't as mega competitive to get funding in those days as it has been for some time in the past. So it was relatively easy. If you decided to do it you didn't have a struggle to do it, it was a fairly straightforward natural next step.

I knew I wasn't going to stay in Edinburgh, because the biochemistry department in Edinburgh was a wee bit like my school. So I knew I wasn't staying there. Although Edinburgh was a nice place to be a student and I enjoyed it, but the department there wasn't where I was going to work. And I suppose I was looking, I became interested in the idea and this partly comes out I suppose of my science fiction reading and things of understanding the brain and I had colleagues who were psychologists and so that fusion of biochemistry and what goes on in the brain, in other words neurochemistry, neuroscience as it's mostly now called became an area that attracted me and so therefore I looked for research opportunities in it. So I kind of progressively narrowed, I guess, but I was always looking for something that I felt was on the cutting edge of where biological sciences were, rather than the routine bread and butter stuff.

What appealed to you about the OU specifically?

I never went to the OU, that wasn't ever what I did. And actually of course to a degree, this can always often be true of people choosing PhDs, ideally you choose your supervisor, you choose the person you want to work with, in a sense regardless of where they are, although of course it can never be regardless. But anyway when I made contact with Steven, was interviewed by

Steven, he was at Imperial. So I'd assumed I was going to Imperial. And in fact actually had spent the first year in London anyway, although not at Imperial, it was at Queen Elizabeth, but the OU was where Stephen went and so that's where I went. I didn't choose it as a place. I was aware of the existence, I was aware of the University of the Air discussions and things. But I think that through my undergraduate years I was too busy doing other stuff to take a lot of notice of what was going on in that area and so it was only really when I met Steven and he said I'm going to the OU and this is what it does and blah-blah-blah that I actually then became aware of it again. And so that's where I went.

And how did you feel about having to make that move?

Well, it didn't bother me at all about making the move in the sense of my PhD will come from the OU rather than Imperial. I think that's probably because in those days I was actually not sufficiently aware of the snobbery of academic circles to be able to judge what its standing in the world might be, whether this was a drop in PhD status or not. I don't think I actually had any real consciousness of that at the time. As it happens, because I was the rebellious person I was, I might have thought that actually I wouldn't go for the traditional. So, I don't know, but anyway I didn't have that consciousness. We were in London for the first year or most of the year anyway so I did wind up in London. And then actually because living in London on almost no money for my wife and myself was actually difficult, it came as a great relief to move out to the countryside - which turned out to have its downsides as well, but it didn't feel to us like you were being forced to leave London and go and live somewhere smaller and less whatever because we wound up with probably a better quality of life, at least for a while.

And what was your family situation at the time?

I was married and was childless. My first child, my son was born, when was our son born, towards the end of my PhD - I wasn't trying to work the dates out; I was actually trying to work out the sequence and so towards the end of that PhD study period.

Well I'll come back to how things might have, because you said it wasn't always as good as it was at the beginning, so I'm quite interested to find out about that. So perhaps we can come back to that a little bit later on if you're happy to. So, just going back to, so what are you most enduring memories about studying for your PhD at the OU?

Well I suppose because it was a small, it was a very small organisation, and because it was very new, it was actually a very flexible organisation. You could do almost anything you liked. It was an endless call for volunteers. And as long as the place could be made to work anything was acceptable. So, you had a very small setting, physical setting in which there were people from lots of different disciplines all muddled up together in a way that doesn't really ever happen in a traditional university. It was a very friendly and welcoming setting, unlike trying to find your way around in much larger and much more set organisations. And, I don't know, I suppose it felt like a pioneering setting that you were in. It was the wild west, I think sometimes we actually described it almost as the wild west. You know, it hadn't settled into strong administrative and academic and cultural boundaries. And that was quite refreshing because I had been at a very traditional university and quite conservative and stuffy in those days, and this was a much more free and relaxed kind of place to be. But on the other hand there are downsides to that, there's a flipside.

I mean the flipside was that the academic community was very small. So unlike a traditional academic biochemistry department for instance or even biology department, there would be lots of academic staff, there would be lots of PhD students and technicians and undergrads and all of that, and none of that existed. You had these very small groups, very small groups of people. Many of the academic staff there didn't actually live there, they commuted in. So they still had their homes and universities wherever and many of them actually still had their PhD students in those universities that they'd come from. So it meant that it had a kind of an absentee feel in some respects because it was an organisation that lots of people didn't live very close to, they travelled in. I mean Steven used to come in on the train. It was positioned where it was because it

had very fast access to London in particular. And of course academics drawn from the Midlands or Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol even could actually come in when they needed to for meetings, but the rest of the time they're working at home.

So the academic community was very small. There were no lab facilities to speak of in a real serious university sense. So it meant that you were, although not necessarily constrained, I think a chunk of your time was taken up with that sort of, there was a kind of modelling of different departments all sharing the same facilities and the need to try to carve a space in which to do stuff out of a rather small amount of established space. Most of the OU when I was there and most of what we lived in were portacabins, you know, the sort of things that people use at the moment for emergency overspill, what actually what it consisted of. The number of solid brick buildings in there was very, very small when I arrived. It was a building site. They issued you with welly boots. I mean literally they issued you with welly boots because you were basically living on a building site, working on a building site.

Did you live in the portacabins as well?

No, no, there was housing around, so the housing was actually quite good around, much, much better than you got in London. So from that point of view there's a real lift in your living standards. And we were in what was at that time, it's now Milton Keynes of course, but the Milton Keynes as of new town fame, but in those days it was absolutely agricultural, rural. And if you went to the pub, you know, the guys would come in off the tractors. You'd be sitting with the guys off the combine harvesters and the tractors and it was very rural. So it was very pleasant in summer, it was a bit less so in winter, but if you wanted to do anything like actually go to the cinema or go to the art gallery, even go to restaurants and things like that, you had to travel because there was nothing there. Bletchley was a very small place and then there were the villages around it.

So therefore I think increasingly there was probably a sense that you lacked the services, the facilities that a big city had and you missed them. You could go to London, and people did, but you had to commute on the train for an hour or whatever. There was a big overhead in finding anything of a city life.

And is that what you were referring to when you said it wasn't so good later on?

Yeah and also of course Milton Keynes did start to develop as a new town and so as a consequence the rural countryside thing began to change as well as it moved towards designing itself into being a new town and they began some of the development on it and things like that. So it too became one monster building site. It wasn't that you were living with it all the time necessarily but there was that sense of it being developed into a new town and the old agriculture stuff was disappearing. The pubs changed and started to yuppify and things like that.

And what did your wife do while you worked?

She was a social worker for Bucks County Council, so she travelled around in Buckinghamshire.

And was she happy with the social side or the living side?

Yes, I think it was fine until, certainly once we had a baby then it was much more difficult then. Services and facilities are a lot less and we were a long way from family. We were quite a long way from family and support.

So what were the important relationships that you did develop during your studies, I know you've mentioned Steven, it'd be good to hear a bit more about that, but also anybody else?

Yeah I mean one of the things that, I should say this at the start in case you've got this image of enduring impact. I mean one of the things is the way I am, the

way I do things, is that when I move on I just move on. I don't have a collection of friends and friendships that go back in time. When I leave somewhere I leave it and I move on and I leave and I move on and I don't have a long trail backwards. And so I had good colleagues and friends when I was working there, but once I moved and then they moved and things. And because it was a quite small group I suppose we went our separate ways quite quickly. My closest colleague there and friend John, he went back to Australia, so he was long separated anyway. And the others I didn't have such a strong connection to I guess that it would particularly endure. And actually over the medium term at least I moved away from that academic research area. My research interest changed and so as a consequence that connection is even more tenuous.

So, in a sense, so the enduring impact that I've got was not so much from people, but it was actually from the OU as an organisation. And curiously at the very end of my life, my interactions with the OU became really strong. So there was this very, very long gap between being a 20-year-old and being a 60-odd-year-old where the connections were strong right at the beginning and the end and they were much, much weaker in the middle. But the impact of the organisation was continuous right across my career.

So when you were actually there, were there any relationships that you think helped you be the most successful you could be with your PhD, like for example your supervisor or any colleagues that you spent time with?

I suppose, I mean we were quite a small group, and so Brian who we talked about, Brian Tiplady who lives down the road from me, he was the postdoc, so he was the only older researcher around I think. And so he was quite helpful, although he did spend periods away as a postdoc on visiting scholarships elsewhere so wasn't always around. John Hambly who I interacted strongly with and then later Ken Stevenson came in. I mean apart from Steven, there was Steven and there was Aaron who was the technician, we had no hierarchical-ness and it was all very equals and first names. So they were continuous through it. Ken Richardson came in later, Sean Murphy came in much later. Javad, who I think, I'm pretty sure never finished his PhD and I couldn't actually

find anything about him. Javad really never wanted to leave London. So he also seemed to be going back to London. He was a great guy and he was good fun, but academically he wasn't really in there.

I think John and I were probably the pair who were the core of the research activity for several years there. We were not far apart in starting. I was there when John came, so he was probably a year after me. And we interacted, we spent a lot of time working together and we did a lot of our PhDs working together, so I would say that it was probably John. And then Steven, Steven influenced me in two different ways, scientifically as the supervisor and he was really good at that and I was happy with that. But also I suppose I actually learned about the radical left and the North London socialists, which was interesting.

[Unclear 0:32:49]?

Only very slightly and I think that's because as a rather gauche northerner I didn't really fit terribly well and it all struck me as a bit twee! Anyway so a little bit, but not very much. Around the IQ and nature/nurture debate, then that was active at that time and so I had a small involvement in that, but it wasn't desperately strong. If you didn't live in London or live where there was that kind of activity and discussion and community, if you were living out in this rural countryside setting with very small numbers of people around it, it just seemed very distant from what you could do and where you were and what you were thinking. And also from Steven I learned, I guess, because he helped to guide me initially in this, I learned about thinking about education differently to the way that I'd always seen it, which was very traditional. And that plus the experiences that I extracted out of the OU in addition to my research, which actually in the end were the longest lasting impacts. So they were actually the by-line to my PhD rather than my PhD research, which turned out to be the long lasting influences on me.

What did you think, when you say you learnt about thinking about education differently, can you give me some examples?

Well until that point in time all you'd ever done as a young person who'd been through school and university was the standard transmission model of learning really to a fair degree. There was no concept that you could do stuff where you weren't face to face, you know, that people were in the same room and you had classes and curriculum and, you know, I suppose you never really thought about where it came from. Where does this curriculum come from and how do you decide how to teach people and how do you decide how to assess them, you know, this was somebody who'd been through English A-levels and entrance exams and then university where exams were the dominant mode of education. There was hardly any other form of assessment. To having to think about the fact that this was a place that had no students. There were no undergrads, not a single undergrad in the place and yet it was going to teach them at a distance and use TV and textual material and all that.

There's a leap to be made there in your understanding about what education is about. And Steven I think had actually, even though he'd come from a very traditional educational setting, had a strong feeling for that and a strong understanding for that, even though I think in the end he and I also wound up differing about some aspects of it, but that was somewhat later. That I guess I got my initial understanding and introduction to it by working with him and talking with him about it. And then out of that came the opportunity to get involved in some of it, which I did, probably to the detriment of my PhD completion, so it took me longer than it should have done, because I did all this other stuff. And that's what, it goes back to what I said about the OU at the beginning, that it was the wild west and whatever you could do to make it work you did it and that meant whatever you did, whatever it took to get the OU to be a success it was all hands on deck and all volunteers taken. And so there were lots of opportunities to get involved in something that you would never ever have got involved in as a PhD student which is actually direct teaching and design of curriculum materials. I've still got the videos of my TV programmes.

Have you, can you send them?

No, I'm not letting go of them. I haven't had them digitised yet. No they're still on VHS tapes.

They're still on the tape, oh right I'll see if I, I don't have anything to play them on. You don't have VHS recorders anymore. Anyway, so you were able to, the OU must have all this stuff in its archives, you were able, alongside doing a PhD, you were able to function almost as one of the academics, you were a member of the course team. And part of that team was IET, Institute of Educational technology, which in those days was very small and was all about, it wasn't about research, it was all about designing the curriculum and the teaching and learning methods that would work with a very large accept all-comers undergraduate degree programme, which didn't exist and was going to be built from the group up after the students had enrolled. So there was, a lot of thinking had to be done and a lot of learning on the part of all the academics who were there because they all came from traditional settings, you know, you had to learn the methodology to think about curriculum design, teaching methods, assessment methods, etc. So I learned an enormous amount out of that. And there were people in that team who came from a publishing background which I'd never come across before and they had a whole different view of how you put stuff together. There were timelines and it was planning and schedules and deliveries and objectives and there was all that kind of jargon that as a postgrad in those days, as an academic in those days actually just wasn't part of how you thought about the world. And that was really eye opening.

So alongside that research which was in one of the cutting edge areas, the opening up of molecular neuroscience was this other thing about the opening up of a different form of higher education. So there were these two different things sitting alongside each other and in a sense cross feeding each other.

Did you, just leaping on slightly and we can go back [unclear 0:41:17] for you to miss stuff, did you go to your graduation?

No, I didn't, and I have no idea why. I can guess because it was actually an awkward time and you had to go to somewhere in London, no so I didn't.

So when you look back over your time studying for your PhD, we've touched on this a bit, but how do you feel about the OU generically and it's philosophy?

Then or now?

Well, both really. I think when you finished your PhD at the time, but also I guess a bit now as well.

I mean I suppose that, getting out and moving on, partly because I knew and I don't really quite remember now how I knew it, but I knew that I wanted to be an academic in a traditional university and I didn't want to be an academic at the OU. I think I missed the fact that we didn't have undergrads around, loads and loads of young adults. That the community was quite small, that you were in a place where the facilities were and always would be very limited in comparison to a conventional university. And so I wanted a conventional university academic post and so therefore by definition you were going to leave. And so then the question was where could you find one? So I think at that point in time, although it had been a valued experience, and I knew that the educational, the impact on my thinking about higher education had been substantial and impact on me understanding about how to do scientific research had been really strong, moving on was the main thing.

It was I suppose that, the lessons that I learned about scientific research and scientific method there have stuck with me because even though I am no longer a scientist, I haven't been a scientist now for 25 or more years I guess, my colleagues in the School of Ed tell me that I do research and think like a scientist. And I do, I do. I can't be bothered with all the positivist, interpretativist, relativistic-type theorising that people sometimes get obsessed with; I'm a pragmatic doer. So that method always has stuck. But the educational methods and thinking and understanding about how you do educational, I suppose it's

not how you do it, it's understanding the way that you design your educational offerings and the learning opportunities that you provide of designing them so that they are thought out and appropriate to the audiences that you're working with and use the correct, a sensible range of teaching methods and assessment methods and understanding how to monitor learning achievements. And that impact was lifelong for me, because over the years my interest in actively doing biological research declined and my interest in being an educator increased so that ultimately I moved from the faculty of medicine in Edinburgh, which is where I was, after 25 years, I left the faculty of medicine and I went into the faculty of education. And that's because in the '90s my interest in digital education, as call it now, but the use of technology in education became really strong. And curiously I was much, much better at getting grants in that area than I ever was in biological research. Maybe of course that's why I moved because actually you go where life's easier. But it was, because when I went to my first job in Leeds and later when I came to Edinburgh, one of the things that, in addition to research, that I majored on if you like or at least I presented as a significant element of what was me as a candidate was education. So it wasn't just about the research, it was about the impact of the OU and my thinking and understanding about how to design higher education curricula.

So the point I think at which I diverged from Steven's thinking about modern higher education was that I'm not sure that he ever really made that, well he certainly didn't make the transition to thinking about digital education as early as I did and he still had this view that you had to have books and there was an element of the old academic still present in it. And I moved on beyond that into the idea that all of this could go digital. And digital education then was actually what I did for the last 25 years of my career, as well as doing the senior management stuff and blah-blah-blah. But digital education was the thing that came back mega strongly. And so at the end, later in my career, when the OU finally decided that it would get into MOOCs, belatedly, because we'd been there for ages before them, the OU and I came back together, because our paths crossed quite often, partly because of Future Learn.

Did you work with the OU at that point?

They were colleagues. We didn't work in a sense directly to do things, but we were present on the same platforms and the same meetings, and we were competitors and collaborators. You know, the Brits versus the world, but it was Edinburgh versus the OU, and I always knew which one was winning. So curiously I actually came back to exactly that point at which the OU, the OU had been out of my normal sphere I suppose for a long period of my career, certainly while I was doing biological research and in my earlier transitions into digital education. But then later and that's particularly because of the MOOCs they came back in, we came back in and we were both at the same place. But I brought Edinburgh with me rather than me just on my own.

And how do you feel about, rather than the practicalities, how do you feel about the OU and its philosophy now?

Well I think that interestingly it very rapidly suffered from the arterial sclerosis that organisations get as they get bigger. And so in the early days when you were there, as I said, it was very small, it was very flexible; it is now a rather stiff administrative bureaucracy in my view, as an organisation. And I think it's actually found it quite difficult to move itself. I have colleagues from the OU, I'm not going to name any names, but colleagues from the OU, and we had strong debates about philosophies about how you actually go about as an academic doing education if you like. And one of them is the OU's one, now the OU's one is this is why I said that I felt it had ossified. You had to be a process. Everything had to be planned. There had to be this timelines and deliverables and schedules and everything had to be done months ahead and checked and costed and blah-blah-blah. And the traditional academic thing is that you've got a Monday morning lecture at nine o'clock and it's Sunday night so you'd better write it.

You know, it's the antithesis of planning. And both of them have got their strengths and both of them have got their weaknesses, but the idea that you could be flexible in your educational provision and still innovative and still at high quality and move fast on your feet, it was not something that the OU had

got in its constitution, in its way of thinking. It was stuck in this idea that everything had to be done by process and had to have timelines and planning. And I was much more in favour of fleet of foot, suck it and see and without casting away your quality and your understanding of the educational principles that you're applying, you could move fast. And I think that the OU, inevitably, I guess, because of the way it has to operate, has lost that spontaneity and flexibility. And you can't say well never mind let's just change it halfway through or whatever, everything has to be done and approved and whatever. And I think that's sort of sad. I think also probably it's, I don't know, its venture into MOOCs was an interesting move, and actually I had colleagues at the OU who were absolutely adamantly opposed to the idea that you could just put courses out there online and anybody could come along and take them. And they might just do it because they were interested in it and they might drop out and you thought but actually wasn't that what the OU was? That anybody could come and you'd put the courses out there and OK, so the OU used to cost, but there was a conflict there. And actually it is interesting of course that the OU largely did all that MOOC stuff off in a company separately from itself.

So, I don't know, I think that it's still seen as the monarch of the Open Universities because it was right there at the beginning and it's been copied all over the world, it's still very influential and I think it still provides a useful higher education service. I think that with time traditional universities have increased their flexibility. And by traditional I mean campus ones where most of the students come along and go to them, I don't mean traditional in the sense of Edinburgh and Oxford and Cambridge, the classic if you like, have increased their flexibility a lot and the higher education marketplace has changed and so I think it's harder now to know whether the OU is able to produce any new thinking and new insights that others might want to emulate. In fact interestingly the last years when the OU decided to move into MOOCs, it was emulating very traditional elite universities. It didn't get there itself. You know, it didn't think up that, why don't we just throw this stuff out to the world for itself. And it didn't really embrace open education either. Everything that it was doing was copywrited.

So I think the trouble was it got kind of stuck because of the administrative and bureaucratic nature of the process that they had to set up, it lost its fleetness of foot and I think that was very sad. But it's still highly respected and I do highly respect it still as an organisation despite those negatives.

Thank you for that, because that's really good honesty to know how you perceive it which is great. The post-doctorate, there are a couple of post-doctorate questions, but I think you've already talked about that really, so I don't plan to ask them unless you had anything prepared that you wanted to say.

I don't think so, not really.

It's all about, what did you do afterwards? What extent did it change your life? But I think you've already covered all of that.

Yes, done all that.

So really it's just to ask, is there anything else that you want to add about your experience specifically of being a PhD student at the OU that you might have not said?

No. I think that because it was so early in the OU's formation and because of the nature of the place of not having a big academic community, of not having significant library and laboratory and etc. facilities, it was a very atypical PhD study period. And, as I said, I think that some of the PhD students who were in areas in which there were no facilities at all available at the OU actually were located in the universities from which their academic supervisor could come. And that probably reduced the size of the community even more. So it was rather small and boutique. And I think from a research point of view, as opposed from the education point, I think from a research point of view as a PhD student one might well have been better served in a traditional conventional setting where there was a lot more academic community around you, more diversity of ideas and options. From the educational point of view, and not everybody got

involved in all of the, building home experiment kits and making TV programmes and writing course units, which is what I did, not everybody got involved in that, I suppose that it was therefore more limiting.

I don't actually know, but it might be worth looking, if the OU wants to look at it, as to what the completion rate for PhDs was like in the early years, how many people signed up and then completed or how many people signed up and didn't. Whether that period was high in terms of non-completions, I don't know the answer to that. I do know two people personally who didn't. But I don't know whether across the organisation it was. But some of that, certainly for those perhaps on site, some of that may have been because of this problem of supervisors commuting and of a very small academic community, because some people were a research group of one, just one PhD student, and that's very isolating. In a traditional academic department, you always ensure that these sorts of things don't really happen. You run seminars and workshops and there are organisational events within universities to provide support for postgrad students. And the OU was unable to provide that because of the nature of it as an organisation.

So, although I did enjoy my research time immensely and I enjoyed, John and I worked strongly together, we built, physically built with our hands and commissioned a lot of the equipment that we used. You had to be quite strong and entrepreneurial I think perhaps to make a success in those very early days; otherwise I think if you didn't have a strong buddy it was probably quite a lonely experience, doing a PhD can be a somewhat lonely experience. And so I'm not quite sure, or scientists it isn't usually you see because scientists tend to work in departments and labs and they're all bundled in there together. I know for social scientists and humanity students in particular it can be a relatively lonely experience. But I think that it was unusual. It was small and friendly, but it was unusual and it did limit the amount of facility and support that you had access to. And for some people that probably really mattered. I don't think it actually mattered for me personally but I think for some people it probably did.

END OF INTERVIEW