

NOT TO BE TAKEN
FROM THE LIBRARY
OPEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

MISCELLANEOUS
COUNTDOWN TO THE OU-1
1981

POST PRODUCTION TRANSCRIPT

PROGRAMME NO. FOU F027W

PROJECT NO. 00525/7155

SPOOL NO. OU 3763

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

DURATION: 24'30"

COUNTDOWN TO THE O.U. - 1 (REMAKE)

This programme is the first in a series of 4, designed to introduce new students to various aspects of the O.U. and includes interviews with members of the academic staff as well as a brief introduction to the history of O.U. broadcasting by Professor Brian Groombridge.

PRODUCER: ROGER TUCKER
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT: KATHY WILSON

TRANSMISSION:

Saturday, 10.1.81 at 1125
Sunday, 11.1.81 at 1035

COUNTDOWN GENERIC TITLES + MUSIC - 15".

Montage sequence of Course Material being packaged and distributed.

VICE-CHANCELLOR (LORD PERRY) V/O

We had to design and produce courses of study that could be undertaken at home in isolation and in the hours that could be spared from work and family. Courses moreover that made intellectual demands at least as searching as those of the Courses of any other University. And we came up with what is undoubtedly the most difficult way of obtaining a degree yet devised by the wit of man.

MICHAEL RICHARDSON:

Welcome to Walton Hall. For the first of our four Countdown programmes in which we're going to show you your way around the Open University, we've come here to Walton Hall at the heart of the Open University's campus and its Headquarters at Milton Keynes. It's here that we'll be able to meet some of the key people. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Academic Policy and the Vice-Chancellor himself.

His office is here in Walton Hall. This part of the house dates from the 1830's - the last private owners were the Earl Family until it was taken over by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation. The University moved here in 1969. Now I'm going to go and ask the Vice-Chancellor some of the questions which will be in your own minds as you begin to approach your University career. Good morning Vice-Chancellor.

VICE-CHANCELLOR:

Good Morning Mike.

MICHAEL RICHARDSON:

I'm going to ask you some of the questions that will be uppermost in the minds of those students who'll shortly be joining us for the first time. I think what's in the minds of probably almost all of them is the question 'Just what kind of an organisation have I joined?' How do you estimate we stand now in the educational world and particularly in the view of other Universities?

VICE-CHANCELLOR:

I think that's an easy one. I think we've become part of the Establishment. I think in the educational world it's now recognised that the standard of the O.U. Degree is the equivalent to that of any other University. The content is very different. The nature of the degree is different but the standard is the same. Anything else would have been a disaster - I mean to offer a second-rate degree to students would be to do them harm. Why should they bother getting a second rate degree and that's been uppermost in the minds of all of us who've been concerned with developing the University.

MICHAEL RICHARDSON:

We heard you say at the beginning of this programme that to acquire an Open University Degree was to get a degree by the hardest way yet devised by the wit of man. Now how do you square that kind of judgment with our commitment as an Institution to being generally open and accessible to particularly those who haven't got the formal educational qualifications usual for University entry?

VICE-CHANCELLOR:

It's difficult to reconcile the two and yet both are true. I think we are Open - we don't have any entrance qualifications - anybody can start - at the same time its also true that its a very difficult way and a much more difficult way of getting a Degree than going to a regular University. I think um many people including myself have referred to the loneliness of the Long Distance Learner and I think its a very real thing. You see if there's a difficult thing to comprehend and you're all by yourself you don't know whether it's you that's stupid or whether it is really a very difficult thing to comprehend. If you're working with a bunch of other people in the same position, you get an immediate feedback. You know if they're all finding it easy or whether it's your fault. If they're all finding it difficult then there's a real problem of getting down to it and working hard at it. And this is absent to a large extent when you're all by yourself. So it's a very difficult route. It also of course involves a

long haul - it takes a long time and people doing it are in full employment usually and have a job to do to earn their salaries and they have to fit this in so it requires a lot of motivation and determination to make the grade.

MICHAEL RICHARDSON:

As another generation of students enter the University how would you describe to them the main features of the opportunity that lies ahead of them?

VICE-CHANCELLOR:

Well I meet a lot of students especially at Graduation time. I think one of the main features that doesn't often get talked about is the emancipation, the feeling that life has opened up in a new way. You get it especially with disabled students, students in institutions, people like this who could never envisage getting a Higher Education until we came along and offered a different method, and I think it extends to all the others as well in a sense. I think that's one thing to look forward to with joy - there are things to look forward to with more apprehension and that is its a hard, a hard grind, its a long time - it has - you've got to stick with it, you've got to be determined. I think students of the Open University have shown this characteristic in a very marked degree and it will come to be recognised as one of the - of the major features of an Open University Degree. So I think when they come in as many of them are coming in in the near future, there are both joys and problems to contend with and all I can say is, I wish them all the very best of luck.

MICHAEL RICHARDSON:

Well there may seem to be many more immediately important things to those of you who are new students than the early history of the University. But the O.U. is still relatively young and it's unique. The background to its Foundation is woven from strands which are still very important to education today. The original concept of the University as conceived by Harold Wilson was of a University of the Air. So right from the start, the medium of broadcasting was considered a key component in its teaching system. The television and radio programmes

are the only important elements in our Courses which are not produced here at Walton Hall. An educational partnership was created with the BBC for this purpose, and since 1970 the Production Centre for making our programmes has been at the BBC Studios at Alexandra Palace, which stands on one of the highest points of North London on Muswell Hill and its from there that Brian Groombridge - who was a member of the original Planning Committee for the University is going to sketch in the early history.

BRIAN GROOMBRIDGE:

This is really rather an appropriate place to talk about the origins of the Open University because when the Victorians built this Alexandra Palace, they intended it to be a Centre for Popular Education. And it was the place from which the first television programmes were transmitted in 1936 so it symbolises in a way the whole idea of the University of the Air. But its very hard for us to recall how difficult it was less than ten years ago for an adult, for a mature person who'd left school for some years actually to study for a degree. And even more difficult to realise that the facilities that existed - the opportunities that existed at that time were regarded as wholly appropriate. You could either take a London External Degreee - and that was an extremely hard route - you probably had to study on your own by Correspondence or if you were in London you could go to Birkbeck College for a part-time course and literally a handful of people were allowed into the other Universities to be mature students. The great thing about the University of the Air was that the University came to you through your television screens, through your radio and of course through your letter-box. But ten years ago the idea seemed silly or outrageous, but when something is a success, as this obviously has been, then there's going to be no lack of claimants for paternity. Um as when Sir Harold Wilson retired from being Prime Minister he said that this was his finest achievement. He first proposed it in an electioneering speech in Glasgow in - in 1963 and here he is putting the record straight as he sees it.

SIR HAROLD WILSON:

I consulted nobody in Britain at all - though of course it is a fact - and this is a reason for the many claims - that there were various schemes germinating in various people's minds for various forms of non-full-time Higher Education. There were of course already a number of things functioning - the Workers' Education Movement or some Local Authorities and many other things. I was perhaps as concerned as anything with the visual side - I was perhaps too concerned with the concept of television and radio. Or I felt the Correspondence side wouldn't be all that difficult to work out and um I hadn't got as far as thinking about what would happen or for arrangements for examining or awarding Degrees.

BRIAN GROOMBRIDGE:

Visits to the Soviet Union and the United States where he'd seen various forms of distance teaching in action had helped to shape the idea in Harold Wilson's mind. But like a great many other inventions - including television or others were on the same track. Michael Young for instance, the Sociologist who founded the Consumers' Association wrote a very important article in 1962 on the idea and there was a pioneering electrical engineer Doctor R.C.T. Williams who was advocating what he called the Tele Varsity and as far - as long ago as 1926 when the BBC first became a Corporation somebody sent a memo to the D-G, John Reith suggesting that there should be a wireless University with listeners learning Latin. We have an Open University because the Prime Minister of the day believed in it and because he backed an exceptionally tough and determined politician um as Minister responsible - Jenny Lee. They pushed it through without too much reference to the Labour Party or the Cabinet or Parliament and its worth listening to Harold Wilson as he describes the fights that went on behind the scenes.

SIR HAROLD WILSON:

I had no support whatsoever from the Ministry of Education or whether departmentally or ministerially - only opposition - and from the Treasury. And that really remained true until Ted Short - who himself had studied externally or became the Minister in 1968 but by that time we were over the hump and the thing was going ahead except for the efforts of the Chancellor every year to cancel it to save money. But or the um they set up a Departmental Working Party which was just about to produce a report to say it wasn't feasible - it wouldn't work - it wasn't necessary and why have it anyway - it would cost too much. And so at that point I wound up the Working Party (LAUGHTER).

BRIAN GROOMBRIDGE:

Meanwhile, Jenny Lee was also doing battle with almost the whole of the Educational Establishment. The Universities in Britain had a better Adult Education record than most but they never thought it necessary to offer on mature people opportunities to study for Degrees. Um so when the Open University was proposed it was dismissed as a Philistine gimmick or it was said that it was not at all necessary or it was said that if there was that kind of money about it ought to be re-allocated to the existing extra mural departments so they could do new Courses on old foundations, or again it was said that if we were to invest in expensive means of communication then they should be used not to help a few thousand people get degrees but to set up a College of the Air. Um I felt that at the time and a good many other people did. But I became convinced otherwise at meetings of the Planning Committee where one saw the determination of Jenny Lee to drive this thing through to make a success of it. This is how she reasoned about it at a lecture she gave at Walton Hall.

JENNY LEE:

There was understandably enormous pressure inside our own Movement of people who said 'Now, what we're concerned about is the boy and girl who left school at fourteen or fifteen; and I said 'well you've got your local schools, Night Schools - you've got your Technical Colleges.' I

was absolutely convinced that we could never strengthen that part of the educational segment working from below up.

BRIAN GROOMBRIDGE:

The Robbins Report had said that Britain had to um increase the number of University places for young people if it was to hold its place in the world and the number of Universities doubled, but that simply enlarged the number of opportunities for young school leavers and what Jenny Lee wanted to do was to strike a blow for adult equality by making it possible for adults also to have this kind of opportunity, and she wanted to do this at a level which had the greatest prestige.

JENNY LEE:

We-we-we resented deeply the idea of anything second class. That's why I would not have it a Working Man's University - a Black Man's University or a White Man's University - you've heard me on this theme before. It was established by a Labour Government but you don't see a University established under a Tory Government as a Tory University - that wasn't the purpose. The purpose was quite austerely to use the mass media.

BRIAN GROOMBRIDGE:

Although it's no longer called 'The University of the Air', broadcasting is still an important component in the whole process, and the success of the Open University's largely based on the fact that it was built on a tradition of educational broadcasting. The BBC's had a commitment to Adult Education ever since its foundation and a great deal of experience and in the 1960's a number of Independent Television Companies experimented with projects which began to show how in practice that tradition could be developed. The Open University have borrowed from Scotland and from American the Credit idea - the idea that you can acquire a Degree by instalments as it were and from the most er original of the other British Universities it's developed some of its best ideas on curriculum development.

MICHAEL RICHARDSON:

These twin strands of tradition and innovation continue to the point where the University finally received its own Royal Charter in 1969. The Charter Ceremony took place at the Royal Society in London and was attended by, amongst others, the late Lord Crowther, who was then installed as the first Chancellor of the University and its titular head. Early discussions of the academic programme led the University to confirm its commitment to a Degree pattern that was based on the credit system. Professor Len Haynes - Professor of Chemistry - is doing a turn of duty as one of the five Pro-Vice-Chancellors who give direct support to the Vice-Chancellor in specific areas of his own responsibility. Len Haynes' present role is as Pro-Vice-Chancellor responsible for Academic Policy.

PROFESSOR LEN HAYNES:

As you know, the requirement for the BA degree is that you should satisfactorily complete 6 course credits and the only limitation on this is that 2 of those credits must be Foundation Courses. I'm assuming you've not got course exemptions and so on. Right, well now this freedom of choice is a very important feature of the Open University Degree. It means that you can actually tailor-make your degree to your own requirements. For example, supposing you're a science student or you're a technician and looking for a degree which is primarily in science, but never the less, you've got an interest in say or the 19th century novel or Renaissance Art or some aspects of sociology. There's no reason at all why you shouldn't combine one or two of these subjects in your science subjects to create a degree which is actually tailor-made for your own purposes. Of course, for those of you who are taking your first Foundation Course, the best advice I can give you, is 'don't rush'. You don't actually have to make a decision until May. We'll talk more about this in another programme. But in making this choice, bear in mind that the whole idea of the Foundation Course you've just taken is to introduce you to a number of subjects within a given area.

And some of those subjects you may not have come across before and it's important that you have at least a taste of those before you decide on that your - exactly what your programme is going to be. When you are making a choice about your course, get all the information and advice you can get. Particularly go to your Tutor Counsellor. Make a point of trying to read - or at least look at - some of the course units that relate to the course that you think you might want to follow. Do make a point of looking at some of the television programmes. It's only a matter of turning on the switch at the right moment and you can get timetables from a number of different sources. The solid document that you can get from the Open University - a rather dull document in a way - is the Courses Handbook and this describes all the courses that the University currently has on offer and on something about the prerequisites - that is the assumptions we make about on the students' basic knowledge when we write the course. Now you may acquire that basic knowledge on from a precedent course in the Open University or it may come from your own knowledge - from your own earlier careers. Anyway, the important thing to do is to think very carefully about what sort of degree you want - why you want and then make a big choice - make a good look at those 120 courses that we have on offer. One last point I would make is that on I hope you enjoy the course. I hope you don't find it too easy. You may then think it's not worth doing. But somehow I don't think you'll have that problem. Enjoy the course.

MICHAEL RICHARDSON:

Well we've been looking briefly at some of the historical and academic aspects of our early development. But what kind of a community of students are we? Certainly we're a very large community, as there are more than sixty thousand Open University students studying in the United Kingdom as of now. But size of course is by no means the whole story. Naomi McIntosh, is the Head of the University Survey Research Department, part of whose job it is to collect statistical data about students. She's uniquely placed to answer more specific questions about the nature of our student population.

NAOMI McINTOSH:

Well, with over 60,000 students, it's obviously difficult to do anything other than make vast generalisations. Erm the most important one is that we cover all ages and although we don't er allow in students under 21 unless they've got good reasons for not going to other places. After that, you can go on up to 90 and we've had graduates in their 70's, 80's and even 90's, I'm told. So most of you come in the mid-20's, 30's er up to early 40's - about 75% er in this middle er middle age group. That mean. you bring with you your families, your jobs and your lives and you've got lots of other things going on at the same time and we've learnt to have to take account of that.

The other thing we've been interested about is to see whether we've done anything to remedy the lack of opportunities for women over the years and we hoped very much that we would have large numbers of women applying - indeed some commentators at the beginning thought that we'd be the haven for housebound Guardian housewives. Well that didn't happen and if you look at the chart which shows the figures over 1971 up to 1979, you'll see that in the beginning, the numbers of women were very low and we were quite anxious to build up the number of women, advertised a lot, put on a lot of pressure and indeed succeeded in bringing the figures right up through to 1975-76. After that point, it seems to have stabilized. This year's been a bit better.

Well, we ask you quite a lot of questions on the application form erm about yourselves and that helps us know what you're like since we can't see you face to face and what you might be interested in studying. We ask you your current occupation, for example and what you might want to change your occupation to erm. Looking at those in broad groupings erm we can also see how your backgrounds are changing and whether the university is meeting the sort of needs that society wanted it to meet. If you look at the next chart, you will see that erm putting occupations into broad groupings, erm housewives I mentioned before are forming a slightly larger group of the overall population. The biggest group at the beginning with the teachers and that caused

a lot of discussion because everybody was worried about them taking over the university. In fact, that's not proved to be the case. We don't use occupation in our decisions about who we admit er but we do use it to understand how you progress. Teachers are now dropping to about a quarter of the occupational groupings and what I've tried to do with the other groups is to put together what you can roughly call the middle-class groups - professional, managerial and scientific - and what you can roughly call the working class groups and you'll see that bottom group - the other non-manual and manual - has increased quite appreciably over the years and we need to take account of this as we write new courses.

Another important question which governments, politicians and we are all interested in is what your educational background is - not to help us choose who comes in but to see how you all do. And if you look at this chart er you'll see that about a $\frac{1}{3}$ of you wouldn't have been accepted for normal degree courses in universities or polytechnics er and that's a very important group for us because we want to make sure that the courses are accessible to you. There's another er sizable group - about $\frac{1}{4}$ who've already got A levels or you're on to ONDs, HNCs, HNDs and you often want to specialise and top up and another very important and large group are the group of teachers who now need to become graduates and want to change their teaching certificates into degrees.

Er what we do need to carry on doing er is asking you for this sort of information, we can't always judge what's happening to you in your own home or in your own study centre, so if we did come back to you with questionnaires or bully you and ask you to come and join in discussion groups or answer the 'phone when we ask you whether you think that course was terrible, you will understand that we're doing it for quite good reasons and we'll feed the information that you give us back into planning those courses for you better.

MICHAEL RICHARDSON:

Well we've been hearing from Naomi McIntosh a number of the global, national statistics about the shape of our student population, and now I'm sitting here in the Students' Record Office in Walton Hall where all the manual records about our students are held, and from which there's direct access onto the student main file.

In the next Countdown Programme, we shall be going out from here into the University's Regional structure to have a look at the kind of records that are kept there and the kind of support services that are available to students in the Regions.

MUSIC - END CREDITS