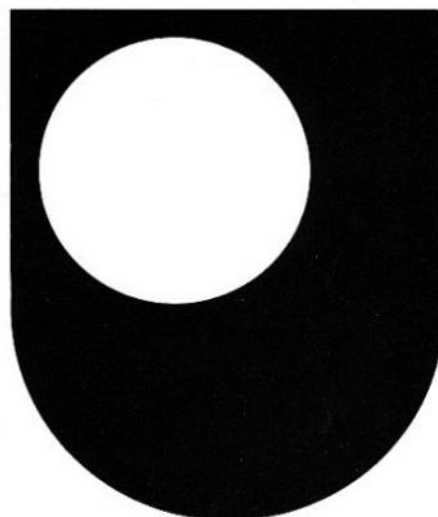


THE OPEN UNIVERSITY



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INTRODUCTION

Originally named the 'University of the Air', the Open University offers an exciting new opportunity for adults to study for degree qualifications through the media of integrated television, radio, and specially designed correspondence courses.

Like any other university the Open University is incorporated under Royal Charter and is an independent autonomous body awarding its own degrees. The permanent headquarters is at the designated new town of Milton Keynes, but many of the university activities are organized through twelve regional centres which cover the whole of the United Kingdom. The teaching programme (in educational partnership with the BBC) begins in

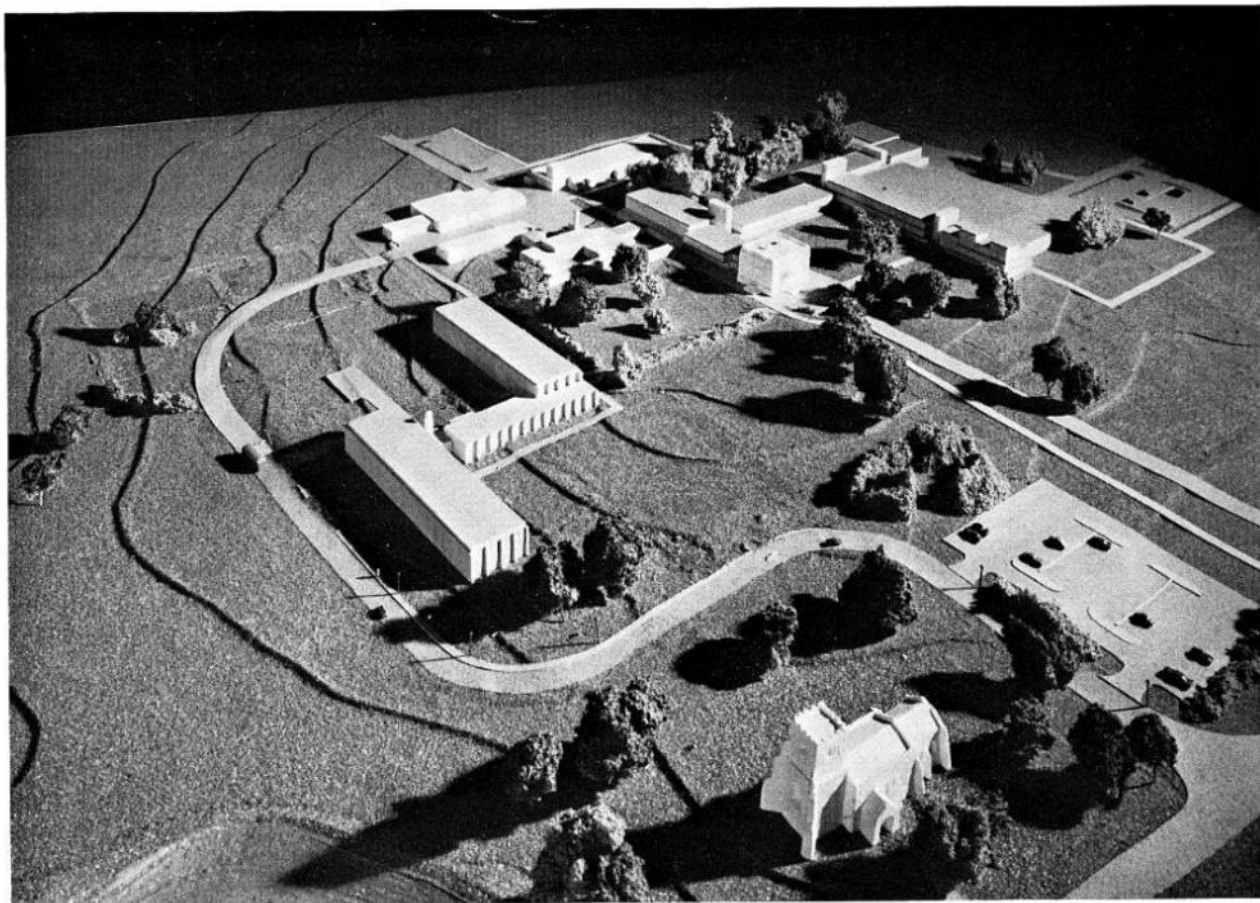
1971 but many students are expected to register in early 1970.

The United Kingdom has made a significant move towards the provision of higher education for all who can benefit from it by the creation of the 'Open University'. The existence of this Institution is yet another recognition that the continuing education of adults is imperative in these times of rapid change. The development of a systems approach to course design and the use of the newer technologies of learning make it possible to cater for large numbers of adult students without removing them from their employment.

The University was first mooted when, impressed by the uses made of broadcasting for educational



Walton Hall – an artist's sketch of the 140-year-old building which is part of the Open University's headquarters in the designated new city of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire.



A model of the proposed layout of the Open University when completed.

purposes in many parts of the world, an Advisory Committee to the Department of Education and Science recommended, in a Government White Paper in February 1966, that a 'University of the Air' was a feasible project. A year and a half later, in September 1967, a committee was established 'to work out a comprehensive plan for an Open University as outlined in the White Paper'. The report was accepted by the Government early in 1969 and the University formally came into being with the granting of its Charter and the installation of its Chancellor last June.

Some of the characteristics of the Open University indicate departures, many of them radical, from the main stream of British university tradition. Other British universities have entrance requirements which, in a period when the expansion of university places has not matched the expansion of secondary and further education, are in practice considerably higher than the published minima; the Open University has no such entrance requirements. The part-time student is a rare phenomenon of British universities; apart from a few residential post-graduate students all of the Open University's undergraduates and post-graduate students will be part time.

Students in other institutions normally take courses running from September to the following July; the Open University's courses will normally run from January to November, enabling use to be made of the facilities of other educational institu-

tions approximately midway through a student's courses since the Open University will have no student laboratories or similar facilities of its own.

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE COURSES

Students in traditional British universities sit several examinations during one period and if they fail in one they fail in all; furthermore there is usually a requirement that the studies must be completed within a definite period of time. The Open University student will be permitted to take one course at a time (though he can take two), and for each course successfully completed he will obtain one credit. To obtain the degree of the University (only a Bachelor of Arts degree will be awarded) the student will have to accumulate six course credits and, for the degree with Honours, eight course credits. He will be able to interrupt his studies for any period of time between courses.

The Open University thus recognizes that adults may be qualified to enter and succeed in university study not only by previously acquired qualifications (if they have them), but by many other of their life experiences and by their motivation to succeed. It recognizes that part-time study may be the most appropriate mode of learning for some adults – for many the only possible way – and probably the most cost effective. It extends the possibility of educational resources, no matter where they are located, being regarded as available for community education purposes. It provides for the adult student a



degree structure which will enable him to integrate his studies into the pattern of his life with the least possible disruption. The more obviously unprepared among prospective students are likely to be advised to take less difficult preparatory courses provided by other bodies, but they will not be prevented from registering if they so wish. If selection becomes necessary, because the number of applicants exceeds the number of places available, then some weighting will be given to age and preparedness for study; but the basic principle which the University will adopt in selecting students is first come, first served.

PREPARATION

Students who have not undertaken any organized study in recent years should in their own interests make some preparation for these courses. Many higher and further education institutions already provide courses of part-time study for adults, e.g. university extramural departments, technical colleges and colleges of further education. In addition, the National Extension College and the BBC are collaborating in the production of three courses which involve the integrated use of correspondence teaching and broadcast programmes in a way comparable to that which the University will employ.

FOUR FOUNDATION COURSES

Students and their treatment is one major area in which the Open University differs from others; another is in the courses which it will produce. In the first place these will have a large measure of integration between studies which are often separated. 'Foundation Courses' in Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Science (in two of which students must gain credits before proceeding to further courses) attempt to integrate four or five subjects. The Science Foundation Course, for example, combines a study of chemistry, geology, physics and biology. The Social Science Foundation Course combines psychology, geography, government, sociology and economics. Integrated studies will continue at least in the second level courses in the lines which produce Foundation Courses, and in two further lines – Technology and

Educational Studies; two which are expected to make a special contribution to in-service training and the development of those with previous experience or knowledge in their subject areas. At this later stage there are also plans for the development of 'inter-line' courses which will integrate studies from two or more major disciplines – for example, a design course which will involve both Art and Engineering.

In the second place, courses are not only to be integrated, but their instructional media are to be combined into a package designed for learning. The major components of the package will be instruction through correspondence, through radio and television and, to a limited extent, through face-to-face tuition available mainly in summer schools.

THE VALUE OF BROADCASTING

It is intended that, within the limits of feasibility and finance, the materials of the course shall be those which promote efficient learning. The correspondence course may contain film, slides, audio tapes, home experimental kits and other learning resources. The budget for the television programmes allows for a variety of programme styles and not merely the simpler and less costly 'teacher in front of a camera'.

To help in the systems design of courses the University has established an Applied Educational Sciences Unit whose members are experienced in course design, in helping others to determine their objectives, and in the appropriate methods of evaluating whether these objectives have been reached. Course teams, which are already at work producing the first four courses of the University, comprise not only the members of the appropriate academic staff and the Applied Educational Science Unit, but also a production representative from the British Broadcasting Corporation (who are producing the radio and television programmes), and a media coordinator from the University's own Media Production Unit, which is responsible for the production of the non-broadcast media.

Broadcasting plays a considerable part in the dissemination of the University's courses; it is likely that each Foundation Course will be supported by weekly television and radio programmes, both original and repeated.

The change from the description 'University of the Air' indicates the major characteristic of the new Institution; it will be open to all persons for whom its budget will enable it to provide and it will try to be open to new methods of teaching and learning.

It is the hope of all connected with the Open University that it will make a substantial contribution to satisfying the need for more highly educated adults resident in the United Kingdom. It is also their hope that this will cause a more widespread awareness not only in the Open University, but in other institutions, of the characteristics of the learning adult, the potentiality of broadcasting for higher educational purposes and the application of the educational technologies to specific learning situations.



North and West Wings of the Open University at Walton Hall, Near Bletchley, Bucks.