Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

A University Without Walls

Book Section

How to cite:

Weinbren, Daniel (2019). A University Without Walls. In: Mehigan, James and Earle, Rod eds. Degrees of Freedom. Prison Education At The Open University. Bristol: Policy Press in association with The Open University, pp. 51–70.

For guidance on citations see FAQs.

© 2020 The Open University

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:
https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/degrees-of-freedom

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data policy on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

4

A university without walls

Dan Weinbren

> The Open University has, in a real sense, two ancestries. One is technological. The other is ideological – the notion of a people's university for continuing education throughout life, the notion of deschooling and universities without walls.
>
> Hooper, 1974, p 183

During its formative years the development of prisoner education at the Open University (henceforth OU) was shaped by prisoners, prison and OU staff, and framed by a government desire to maintain and develop society through broadening prospects for social improvement. OU staff tended to see the university as part of a social democratic commitment to rehabilitation. Their pedagogy encouraged learners to be active in constructing knowledge by reflection on experience. For many prisoners, education was a means of escape, or at least engaging with ideas from beyond the walls.

The first part of this chapter outlines the OU's creation as an element of the support for pluralism, wider opportunities and the belief that humans can and should shape the world which defined the post-war settlement. Directed by overt government audit and intervention, the OU employed industrial-scale teaching and a range of media to showcase scientific efficiency and to promote British-focused culture and western values. Within the context of a Cold War rivalry which stimulated further expansion of welfare provision, the OU normalized the marketisation of social democracy. This understanding of the OU's role informs the focus in Chapters 6 to 14 on the perspectives and understandings of some of those involved in the OU's prison work.

The OU had its roots in part-time education for adults, developed from the 18th century, in the correspondence courses and university extension initiatives of the 19th century, and in the 20th-century sandwich courses, summer schools and educational radio and television broadcasts. These seeds were nurtured in the 1960s when the post-war

population bulge led to an increased demand for higher education, greater interest in post-compulsory education and widespread acceptance that expenditure on education was reasonable and likely to aid sound governance.

Leader of HM Opposition, Harold Wilson wrote an introduction to a Labour Party report which argued that 'Britain's economic stagnation is a direct result of its neglect of higher education' (Labour Party study group on higher education chaired by Lord Taylor, 1963) while the Robbins Report on higher education concluded that a 'highly educated population is essential to meet competitive pressures in the modern world' (Robbins, 1963, p 268). Wilson told the 1963 Labour Party conference that a university of the air could enable aspirant learners to contribute to 'the Britain that is going to be forged in the white heat of this revolution' (Wilson, 1963; Dorey, 2015). He stressed that 'we cannot as a nation afford to cut off three quarters or more of our children from virtually any chance of higher education' (Wilson, 1963). Labour's 1964 manifesto called for 'a major change of attitude towards the scientific revolution' and a 'national economic plan with both sides of industry operating in partnership with the Government' (Labour Party, 1964). The OU was to be economically viable through the sale of teaching materials. Students did not receive grants. Many worked and paid both taxes and fees. It benefited from lower fixed costs than other universities as it used off-the-shelf components, notably books, telephones, gramophone records and state broadcasting equipment. OU students used the libraries and buildings of other universities and received teaching materials at home.

Other UK universities which opened in the 1960s saw themselves in the tradition of communities of investigative scholars. Sussex (which received its Royal Charter in 1961) was compared to a wealthy and prestigious Oxford college when it was referred to as Balliol-by-the-Sea. By contrast, the OU was regarded more as 'an industrial revolution in higher education', aiming to create an administrative and teaching workforce using the latest ideas of modern production and industrialisation (Drake, 1972, p 158). Teaching materials were created stage-by-stage, with different batches produced by teams, which included editors and BBC producers as well as academics. There was a division of labour (with short-term, teaching-only contracts and specialist support staff), economies of scale, mass mailouts and the language of 'lines of study', 'units' and 'production', central control of content and automated assessment. This fragmentation of work enabled the OU to promote social goals at low cost.

The OU was not regulated by the University Grants Committee system, which channelled funds from governments to universities. Rather, it was a 'very eccentric institution [being] a university funded directly by the state, and run by a direct grant from the state' (Pratt, 1970, p 375). Jennie Lee, the minister tasked with creating the OU, took a personal interest and ensured 'that little bastard that I have hugged to my bosom and cherished, that all the others have tried to kill off, will thrive' (Hollis, 1998, p 321). The OU was a product of the 'great reappraisal' of the 1960s, when governments sought to create a 'developmental state' as a means of revitalising the economy (Brittan, 1964, pp 204–45). There was support for scientific intellectuals with technocratic expertise and an enthusiasm for rational planning (Savage, 2011). Modernisation was promoted as a response to Britain's perceived decline and 'Wilson and his team displayed great skill in presenting growth, modernisation and social justice as part of a seamless internationalist, socialist, whole' (Block, 2006, p 349). 'Resembling a school or university campus' HMP Blundeston, opened in 1963, reflected the shift in attitudes 'from detention and retribution towards training and rehabilitation' (Jewkes and Johnston, 2007, p 188). The Criminal Justice Act 1967 aimed to streamline court procedures and to modernise the penal system. The 1968 report on the civil service by Lord Fulton revealed how the machinery of state would be restructured on scientific lines. The 1969 White Paper, *In place of strife* aimed to end 'unscientific' workplace practices and to promote greater sharing of control; in the same year the government presided over the opening of Longbridge, the biggest car plant in Europe.

The OU was one of many state projects of the 1960s which sought to promote high art and higher education. The publicly owned Royal Festival Hall in London was extended and refurbished and a second concert hall and an art gallery were added. Arts Council of Great Britain funding increased by 45 per cent in 1966 and a further 26 per cent in 1967, raising it to £7.2 million (Fisher, 2019). The BBC television series *Civilisation: A personal view by Kenneth Clark*, the benchmark for educational broadcasting of the era, focused on western art, architecture and philosophy. It echoed Senator William Benton's series Great Books of the Western World, which he hoped would enlighten citizens and act as a bulwark against communism. The 1966 White Paper, which set out the role the OU was to play, made clear that it was to 'advance technological studies', make a 'vital contribution to the education and cultural development' and that its 'main aim is to improve the educational, cultural and professional standards of the country as a whole' (*A university of the air*, 1966, para.

8). The state's role could be wide-reaching and ambitious; there 'was the pervasive influence of communal ideologies and state intervention' (Glendinning, 2003, p 277). These developments framed the decision to support OU learners in prison.

The OU would employ scientific, industrial means not only to disseminate culture but also to support the creation of economically productive citizens. It was an element of the Keynesian compact. The OU was, Wilson (1963) said, to 'cater for a wide variety of potential students [including] technologists who perhaps left school at sixteen'. Reflecting on why he had accepted prisoners as students, Walter Perry, the OU's first vice-chancellor, argued that the OU was 'providing an opportunity of retraining that may prove to be of inestimable value in reclaiming them as active and useful citizens on their release' (Perry, 1976, p 174). Personal accounts by prisoners underline the point. David, from HMP Long Lartin, studied with the OU and concluded 'no longer do I think of myself as only able to do menial jobs' (in Open University, 2018, p 5). Forster's 1976 study revealed that there was recognition that employment prospects might not be improved through study. 'As an ex-con is difficult to employ anyhow, an ex-con with a degree is practically impossible' said one; and 'I'm doing an Open University degree' said another, adding 'Not a scrap of use when I get out' (Forster, 1976, pp 17, 22). However, a more recent study concluded that learning in prison could raise hopes and aspirations for learning and employment upon release (Pike and Hopkins, 2019).

The OU built on the experiences of other countries, including the USSR's model of using radio, television and correspondence for propaganda and education (King, 1963, p 182, 185). This impressed Wilson and his US-backer, William Benton (Benton, 1966; MacArthur, 1974). The latter saw the OU as a means of countering the achievements of communism, arguing that 'the cold war between the open and closed societies is likely to be won in the world's classrooms, libraries, and college and university laboratories' (Benton, 1960). Benton advised Wilson on a 'television university' and introduced him to Geoffrey Crowther, Vice-Chair of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* editorial board (which Benton owned). Crowther became the first chancellor of the OU. Asa Briggs, who would also become an OU chancellor, edited a ready reference version of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The OU's first vice-chancellor, Perry felt that Benton contributed to the decision to found the OU and considered purchasing 280 sets of the 27 volume *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in order to equip OU study centres (Perry, 1973, p 30; Weinbren, 2014b, pp 35–6). It was these contexts that informed the

historian Eric Hobsbawm's (1990: 21) pithy statement that, 'Whatever Stalin did to the Russians, he was good for the common people of the West.' They reflect Benton's Cold War strategy of reliance not on the threat of conflict but on the building of higher education for social and economic development. The approach was also manifest in the appointment to the OU's first council of Norman MacKenzie. He worked in propaganda and for the secret intelligence service, MI6, in eastern Europe (Purcell, 2015). Subsequently, the government directed the OU to buttress open learning institutions in Thailand, the Netherlands, the Republic of Suriname and the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It sent teams to Iran, Venezuela, Pakistan and Israel. In this sense, the OU operated as an arm of the state.

Wilson sought 'to provide an opportunity for those, who, for one reason or another, have not been able to take advantage of higher education' (Wilson, 1964, p 27). The Labour Secretary of State for Education, 1965–67, Anthony Crosland, felt that education was the 'main engine in the creation of a more just society' (Crosland, 1982, p 69). Studying was a route to peaceful social progress through personal development. In common with the seven new campus universities built in England in the 1960s, the first stated objective of the OU's 1969 Royal Charter was to advance and disseminate learning and knowledge. In addition, the OU was, 'to promote the educational well-being of the community generally' (Open University, nd). In 1993 OU Professor Stuart Hall noted that the OU was 'filled with good social democrats. Everybody there believes in the redistribution of educational opportunities and seeks to remedy the exclusiveness of British education' (Hall, 1993, p 15). He added that 'it would have been funny to come to the OU and not to be committed to redistributing educational opportunities'.[1]

This approach was reinforced by the OU's teaching strategy. Available to students from January 1971, the OU taught adults, on a part-time basis, regardless of their prior qualifications, largely through correspondence and, to a lesser extent, through broadcasting and group tutorials held in local study centres and during residential weeks, arranged on hired campuses. Central staff prepared the teaching materials, which initially were mainly in the form of books, television programmes and radio broadcasts. Students could study a wide range of courses for an 'Open' degree. Each course was staffed by specialist course tutors. Part-time tutors, resident all over the country, taught and assessed groups in their area ,often employing the OU's preferred pedagogy of collaborative engagement. Some tutors were also counsellors, offering advice on course choices, study skills and

a range of other issues. These councillors remained with the student throughout their studies. Tutor-counsellors were managed by senior counsellors.

Talulawa noted that 'democratic tendencies' and learner-centred pedagogical practices are intertwined (2003, pp 7, 10). The OU encouraged student self-help groups and by 1974 there were over a thousand of these (Sewart, 1975). In his 1976 study of prisoner students William Forster concluded that 'One of the most valuable things I saw was the 'self-help' group which was a mixture of inmates and non-inmates meeting regularly in a prison' (1976, p 26). The specialist press called the OU the 'great liberal experiment' and a 'cosy scheme that shows the Socialists at their most endearing but impractical worst' (*Times Higher Education Supplement*, 1966, 1971).

When OU Vice-Chancellor Sir John Daniel sought to emphasise the values of the OU he cited the case of the graduate who said with exasperation that ever since he studied with the OU he has been unable to see less than six sides to any question (Lunneborg, 1997). Daniel (1998) concluded: 'That is what our founders meant by openness to ideas. That is a wonderful contribution that the OU is making to a free, democratic and civilised society.'

Although it was not designed to support the learning of prisoners, the OU's structure meant that whenever and wherever a prisoner moved to another prison, there could be support. Sometimes this meant long distances to travel. One tutor who lived in Milton Keynes supported a student in prison in HMP Acklington, Northumberland (Regan, 2003, p 5). OU teaching materials were largely suitable for isolated part-time adult learners and OU staff were often motivated by a belief in the positive impact of education on recidivism. In 1970, starting with two prisons for men, the Home Office offered to make OU courses available to prisoners to pay fees and provide facilities. This system was amended in 2012 when students serving sentences with fewer than six years left were permitted to access student loans. In 1971 6 prisoners in HMP Albany and 16 in HMP Wakefield started their OU studies. By the end of the presentations that year two had gained credits with distinction, 15 gained credits, four failed and one had dropped out. Thirteen students continued their studies in 1972 and they were joined by 27 more students, including 8 from HMP Gartree. The scheme was extended beyond England with a further prisoner in Belfast and two in Scotland (Perry, 1972). The prisoners pass rate in 1974 was 45 per cent as many withdrew before they reached the examination. Those who sat the examinations had what the vice-

chancellor, Walter Perry, called 'reasonably good' results (Perry, 1976, p 173). In 1974 the first prisoner graduated. By 1975 there were 109 students at 11 establishments and by 1976 142 prisoners in 14 establishments studying 197 subjects (Forster, 1976, p 7). Expansion has been uneven but by 2018 there were 1,444 OU students in secure environments.

It was OU staff based in the regional and Celtic nation offices who negotiated initiatives with prisons in their area. OU students in prison could not attend the residential schools or tutorials but at least one prisoner was permitted to attend a mainstream residential school. The School Director said "I decided to keep it to myself, and let him have a week as a normal student" (personal communication, 29 April 2019). **[[AU: email to Weinbren refs have been changed to this format and do not appear in the refs list now. I think add a note here explaining these are emails to author and letters/emails to P. Regan and O. Simpson (presumably passed to author?). These have been put in the same format]]** In 1976 Bob Davies, a senior counsellor, arranged a version of a summer school in a prison and also for students from outside the prison to join those inside in tutorials. There was a five-day programme to mimic the residential school attended by other students studying the same course. Donald Burrows went in to play the piano in the chapel as part of the course's music element (*Open Forum*, 1976). Student Sue Astbury was not a prisoner but was unable to attend the conventional summer school. In 1978 she attended a prison version (*Open Forum*, 1978). In HMP Frankland and HMP Durham, "we organised informal summer schools 'in both prisons and each prison had its own counsellors allocated", recalled Assistant Regional Director Peter Regan (personal communication to author, 28 Feb. 2019). At Frankland the Acting Governor felt this should be repeated (D.J. Cornwall, personal communication to Peter Regan, 30 November 1994). It was 'for many years a prison with an excellent record for OU study' (Regan, 2003, p 4).

The OU also taught British citizens in Europe (*Times Higher* **[[AU: *Education Supplement?*]]**, 2002). The logistics of arranging OU teaching was largely the responsibility of the 12, later 13, offices. Peter Regan recalled that "we needed no input from Walton Hall [the OU's Milton Keynes headquarters]. Regions were autonomous." He emphasised that "Walton Hall had little involvement [...] We collaborated with administrators at Milton Keynes, rather than following their instructions" and, in particular, "we didn't take many orders from Walton Hall; they didn't intervene in our European operations" (personal communication, 28 February 2019). This

division may have led to a reduced sense of responsibility from Walton Hall. Counsellor Vicki Goodwin pointed out that "secure units were always complex and difficult" and "I felt that [the OU] senior management never really wanted to know" (personal communication, 27 February 2019). Moreover, Forster's study concluded that 'the essential weakness of the present system is its local, sporadic, nature'. He called for a 'national relationship' (Forster, 1976, p 30). The OU was not routinely informed when prisoners were moved to other prisons. This could often result in a reduction in support or access to study facilities (B. Stevenson, personal communication, 9 March 2019; R. Peoples, personal communication, 11 March 2019). Eventually the Scottish Office agreed that, in Scotland only, students should not be moved from prison to prison without notice being given to the OU, and that they should have a place and time to study and access to tutors. Counsellor Judith George noted that while this "created a more productive environment […] the Prison Service institutionally did not and probably does not value education highly, and we always had to keep a firm hand on the conditions of the scheme" (personal communication, 11 March 2019). Katla Helgason started to study at the OU in 1971, became a tutor and later Assistant Director in Scotland. She developed the Scottish Prison Scheme and felt that tutors "had to be very proactive and very positive".[2]

Locks on doors and metal bars on windows, and the focus on punishment, correction and rehabilitation indicate that there are many ways in which prisons are different to the world beyond the gates. In prisons there is surveillance and little trust. This is how one prisoner described it to his tutor:

> In prison there is rarely another inmate following the same course and visits from a tutor can be infrequent and sometimes impossible. There is noise, arbitrary interruption, tension and sometimes the threat of violence […] The student in prison can face prejudice, jealousy and ridicule in an environment which is often hostile to intellectual activity. (Regan, 1996)

If a student needs to be employed to register for an OU module, for example, as a teacher or in social work, then access to the module is unlikely to be allowed or the module may not be made available to students in prisons. Students convicted of sex offences against children were unlikely to be permitted to study a module which features children among its topics.

Initially VHF radios were not permitted in prisons, although subsequently in some prisons it was agreed that OU students could be permitted own their own VHF radio sets in order to receive broadcasts. Most forms of media are regarded with suspicion by prison authorities as they undermine the aim of removing a person from society. Sometimes CDs, DVDs and calculators have been banned. Telephone calls are monitored and restricted. This is however, 'a vibrant economy in illicit and thus unmonitored, mobile phones' (Earle, 2011, p 27). Internet access for students in prison is limited, although a Virtual Campus is now accessible from public prisons (*Inside News*, 2009, pp 6, 2). **[[AU: is this the Open University 2009a ref? *Inside News* March?]]** Although students' Home Experiment Kits, which contained chemicals, were often banned, Jack Singleton, who presented a radio magazine series for OU students, recalled conducting an interview "with someone in a top security mental hospital who had killed someone with an axe and he got to the stage where he was allowed to do the Biological Bases of Behavior [module], in which you have a kit which includes a scalpel" (*Open Forum*, 1976).

Teaching in prisons in England and Wales relied on the support of the Home Office, later the Ministry of Justice, and individual prison staff (Regan, 2003, p 1). Particular wing management styles had an impact on student's ability to study (Regan, 2003, p 10). OU tutor Anne Langley, recalled the secure unit at HMP Whitemoor which, was, for tutors, "quite a frustrating business – getting in and out took a very long time and if there was a lock-down the session would be cancelled without notice" (personal communication, 27 February 2019). The OU Regional Centre for mainland Europe, excluding Ireland, was in Newcastle and the Assistant Director in that location recalled a British prisoner held in a prison in Madrid who wrote regarding a forthcoming OU visit: "if they say I'm not here, which has been known to happen, please do your best to insist" (personal communication to P. Regan, 20 April 1995). OU Tutor Counsellor Pete Cannell said that at HMP Shotts "the prison officers were fairly hostile and made things difficult for visiting tutors on occasions" (personal communication, 12 March 2019). Prison officers could be resentful (Weinbren, 2018, p 51). One tutor noted 'the generally negative and uncooperative attitude of prison officers' (Watts, 2010, p 59). In general, there was often an 'anti-intellectual atmosphere' in prisons (Simpson, 2002a, p 158; Irwin, 2008, p 519). Most OU teaching materials were delivered through correspondence, yet no prisoner was able to receive mail or send mail freely. There was reliance on intermediaries and often delays to the arrival (Regan, 1996).

OU Senior Counsellor Richard Peoples, recalled that students:

> said that finding time for quiet study was often a problem. They could opt for education during the day instead of working in the prison workshops (and thus giving up the chance of earning), but this did not provide enough time and trying to study in their cells in the evenings before 'lights out' was often difficult because of noise and other interruptions. (personal communication, 11 March 2019)

Although Peter Regan noted, of the prisons of north-east England, that 'most classrooms in prisons bear comparison with those in an average Further Education college', sometimes teaching took place in a room not designed for that purpose (Regan, 2003). Tutors recall teaching in cells. Often the door was open and a prison officer was outside (Irwin, 2008, p 520; Watts, 2010, p 60; M. Paris, personal communication to O. Simpson, 12 March 2019). However, when tutor Valerie Pedlar taught 19th-century literature to a man in Ashworth high security psychiatric hospital she was left alone with him. She nervously taught *Mansfield Park* and recalled that when the student explained that "he couldn't wait to get to *Wuthering Heights*, and me thinking he looked rather like Heathcliff and hoping he wouldn't act like him!" (personal communication, 27 February 2019). Teaching at HMP Wormwood Scrubs 'took place in a kind of goldfish bowl room' while elsewhere a dining room was utilised (Regan, 2003, p 14; Youle, personal communication, 27 February 2019).

Personal accounts also refer to support for learners from within prisons. Tutor Tony Kelly said prison education staff 'were always positive and they were helpful' (Regan, 2003, p 13). Senior Counsellor Pete Cannell improved relationships by constructing a creative writing course for the Scottish Prisoner Officers Association (personal communication, 12 March 2019). Senior Counsellor Chris Youle recalls having a "good, fairly close, relationship on behalf of the London Region, with the Education Department at HMP Wormwood Scrubs prison". He was permitted to take a student, accompanied by a prison officer, to the London Region office in order to use a computer and was allowed to bring a car full of materials for a Course Choice meeting into the prison (personal communication, 27 February 2019). Tutor Counsellor Richard Peoples recalled that HMP Whitemoor "had a very enthusiastic education officer who encouraged OU study for prisoners who were deemed to benefit from it" (personal communication, 11 March 2019). HMP Maidstone

permitted a student to accompany a tutor for four days for a version of a residential school and allowed prisoners to watch video recordings of television programmes and to listen to cassette recordings of radio programmes.

OU students do not start their studies assuming that a university education is a birthright determined by their class position, previous educational qualifications or age. Graduation, being awarded a degree certificate, is not another step on an apparently seamless, individual intellectual journey from school to degree. It is achieved after years of hard work, commitment, and support. Whether they take place in prestigious public buildings or prisons, award ceremonies are valued by students and their teachers (Simpson, 2006, p 11). Norman Woods, a Regional Director, fondly recalled prison graduation ceremonies: "You used to put on your glad rags and go and hand them their diploma and certificate, whatever. And their families used to come in. You know, it was quite good. And the prison would provide some cakes and cup of tea."[3] At HMP Whitemoor the graduand and other OU students (and those applying) were allowed to attend ceremonies held in the chapel. Richard Peoples recalled:

> we wore robes, had a procession with music etc. in order to try to simulate a normal degree ceremony. The last one I attended was at Whitemoor, when the graduand told me that he had been in prison for 18 years, that he could not read or write when he first went in and that he had been in trouble for fighting and other offences many times before he started OU but had now 'calmed down'. (personal communication, 11 March 2019).

Peter Regan wrote that "it was affecting to see a man detained for decades in tears as we read out a list of his academic achievements, a man serving time for serious terrorist offences" (personal communication, 28 February 2019). In 1982 OU's North Region took responsibility for students in Benelux. In 1994 it added responsibilities for students in Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia and the EU. Senior Counsellor Liz Manning, the country manager for Germany, Austria, Switzerland and France, arranged for a tutor to travel from Vienna to a remote prison in Austria to tutor 'Michael'. On graduation, permission was granted for 'Michael' to travel to Vienna to receive his degree certificate from Liz: "I made a speech to an audience of our office staff, a former fellow prisoner, the British Consul General and his [Michael's] social worker. We then went out for lunch before he returned to prison"

(personal communication, 28 February 2019). Ron's graduation in a prison chapel was attended by staff, prisoners (Ron had taught many of them) the chaplain, the governor and Ron's parents. Counsellor Ormond Simpson, wearing his gown, gave a speech. Ron, in a gown borrowed from a tutor, said that this was the first time that he had been a credit to his parents and burst into tears (Simpson, 2002b, p 38, 2006, p 10). The OU has taken pride in the success of its students in prisons. The keynote speaker, to mark its fortieth birthday in 2009, was former bank robber Bobby Cummines OBE (Open University, 2009). In February 2019 the OU's Chancellor, Martha Lane Fox, tweeted about the 'amazing inmates and staff' when she presided over an award ceremony in a prison. She added: 'I'm so impressed by dedication of our students even in the most complex and difficult situations … Two women fought for the budget to get computers for 5 years – and with that changed their own + peers ability to study' (Lane Fox, 2019). A degree certificate is not only a symbol of the possibility of personal redemption through education, it is also a sign of success for a wider community. Supporting adult learners in prison has been a collaborative effort involving a range of prison and university staff. There have been positive impacts on those outside the prisons. An OU student in HMP Barlinnie said that his relationship with his wife and children improved as a direct result of his having studied P912, The Pre-school Child, a module designed for prisoners. Prisoner James Crosby explained that 'studying in prison for me is a collective effort' and cited help from his family who provided him with information based on their 'lengthy searches of the internet'. **[[AU: is this a personal communication? date?]]**

OU students, in prison or not, need to be self-reliant, to create new spaces for themselves where they can imagine themselves as part of a community of scholars and can think and feel outside their existing normative and conceptual frameworks. This work of carving out space is described by one prisoner who said that he applied to study at the OU 'so that for just a few hours a week I could get away from the obscenities, the prison gossip, the scheming' (Forster, 1976, p 24). One OU broadcast concluded that "when you become an [OU] undergraduate you become a member of that university and it gives you a sense of belonging to something else other than the prison community". The OU offered "some sense of a lifeline to the world outside" and "a completely different dimension" (*Open Forum*, 1976). 'When I'm working,' reflected one student prisoner, 'I know that I'm doing what others outside are doing, and most likely doing it just as well.' Another spoke of studying as 'a lifeline – it reaches outside. I'm

a member of the University and that means that I'm still am member of the human race' (Forster, 1976, p 21).

The notion of places where two different worlds mesh or collide was employed in the 1970s by founder of the French-based Prison Information Group, Michel Foucault. He categorised a prison as a 'place which lies outside all places and yet is localizable', a heterotopia. Isolated and penetrable, with its own rules it also conformed to the wider social order. These were places where people could juxtapose 'in a single real space, several spaces, several sites which are themselves incompatible'. **[[AU: add ref for quotes in previous two sentences?]]** These features of profoundly intersecting realities are commonly recognised by OU staff and prisoner students. Studying, engagement with OU texts, took people in prison to these 'other places' in which existing arrangements of their lives in prison could be 'represented, contested and inverted'. Such places, by altering the mundane, provided an escape but one which involved no physical movement (Foucault, 1986). Forster's 1976 analysis of studying in prison included interviews with 53 student prisoners. He concluded that to enter a prison is to 'enter another world', that 'the concentration required [for study] removes the student from prison for a while', and that many saw studying as an 'escape from routine'. He quoted a prison officer's view that 'it doesn't help them to adjust to prison at all – it just helps them to pretend they're not here' (Forster, 1976, pp 12, 15, 22, 31). A former Irish Republican prisoner in the Maze/Long Kesh prisons of Northern Ireland recalled how students disassociated their studies from the rest of the prison regime by calling the classroom by its Irish name, '*seomra rang*' (McAtackney, 2006). Recent efforts to re-label the prison as 'a campus of offender learners' or a 'secure college' may be critically illuminated by Foucault's idea of a problematic and productive juxtaposition of competing worlds trying to occupy a single space (Irwin, 2008, p 523).

High theory and hard prison grind can meet in relatively mundane penal experiences. During one OU exam a prisoner had to be guarded by an officer with a dog. When there was a shift change the next officer arrived with another dog. The animals fought. Prison staff rushed to the scene. The OU invigilator recalled 'alarms went off, prison officers appeared from all over the place and there was general turmoil'. Afterwards, the student merely said 'I just kept on writing. I wasn't going to miss my chance of the exam' (Simpson, 2006, p 13).

For many, however, moving into and remaining in the alternative space was not always straightforward. 'Andrew' recalled 'You can treat it like you're in a university [...] I didn't feel like a student most of the

time. Occasionally when I'm here [independent learning room] I do, but you are reminded very quickly on the wing that you're in prison!' (Pike and Hopkins, 2019, pp 48–65 **[[AU: please give precise pg if poss]]**). Student prisoner Jed noted that 'I sort of dissociate myself with prison [...] I'm like at a crossroads. I've got one foot in and one foot out of my previous life.' **[[AU: also in Pike and H? ie same source as previous quote?]]**

Tutor Tracy Irwin noticed that 'prisoners would often come to the classroom in disturbed or distressed state after a difficult visit or following bad news from outside' (Irwin, 2008, p 517). Tutor Jackie Watts explained:

> During my three years as a higher education tutor in prison I was never once able to move straight into a teaching role at the start of the session. This was because before the student could move into the student 'self' to be fully engaged in the learning situation, it was necessary for [the student] to actively, if only temporarily, leave and 'unlock' the prisoner 'self'. (Watts, 2010, p 62)

Having taught her non-prisoner OU students about the justifications for killing people, Liz Manning took the topic up with an OU student prisoner in HMP Durham who had been found guilty of murder. While the situation "must have been extremely stressful", Liz recalled that "our conversation was no different from the one I had with my main groups" (personal communication, 28 February 2019). Other prisoners found sociology and psychology difficult to study as they encouraged critical awareness of their environment. One sociology student in prison said:

> Attitudes, roles and structures are so easy to see in here and so unchanging and I had nothing else to think about. I spent weeks feeling as though I was behind a glass window, just watching it all. I could hardly speak to people. (Forster, 1976, p 25)

Study in prison held up a mirror to institutions and, as Foucault noted, in a mirror there is a virtual space that opens up behind the surface:

> The mirror functions as a heterotopia in the sense that it makes this place I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass both utterly real, connected with the

> entire space surrounding it and utterly unreal. (Foucault, 1986)

Studying the immediate situation, albeit in a relatively abstract fashion, left some prisoners less able to cope on their return to their non-academic surroundings.

The desire to escape to a different space is one that features in narratives inside and outside prison walls. For those outside prison the OU could also aid transportation from the everyday and, just as in prison, students outside sometimes faced hostility. One student recalled her husband's reaction when he discovered that she was studying with the OU by finding her books: 'He threw them all down the rubbish chute (we live on the 7th floor)' (Atkins and Beard, 2010, p 26). In Willy Russell's popular play (later film) *Educating Rita*, the eponymous heroine initially has difficulty studying with the OU as she cannot open the door to her tutor's office. By the end she has left her husband, who burnt her books, and claimed the space as her own. Director and actor David Heley noted, regarding a tour of the play to a prison, that 'many of the prisoners said how they recognised themselves within the play's action and meaning'.[4] When students in prison and elsewhere have built spaces of alternative ordering as a defence against isolation, marginalisation and lack of confidence it is because, within a few years of its creation, the OU had constructed an ethos and relatively robust pedagogic support systems for its learners.

Conclusion

While all UK universities relied on public funding for survival, the OU, during its formative years, had closer and more numerous ties to central government than most. It exemplified government commitments to securing social peace and stability, to the efficiency associated with large-scale production and to enabling the market, as well as the public sector, to thrive. It also drew support from private institutions in the USA which delivered cultural elements of the Cold War (Berghahn, 2001; Czernecki, 2013). Since that period there has been a shift from government towards governance. Funding has been linked to auditing and a discourse of efficiency. There has been a development of quasi-markets that attempt to blend and blur the distinction between self-regulation and state regulation (Le Grand and Bartlett, 1993). The roles played by the state have changed (Rhodes, 1994). Some of those alterations were prefigured in the OU (Weinbren, 2012, 2014 **[[AU: 2014a or b? See refs]]**). Universities are expected to focus

less on educating citizens for democratic engagement and more on functioning as an industry (Kezar, 2004, pp 430, 433). There have been parallel changes within the prison sector. The OU was well-positioned to ease the development of universities bidding for funds for student teaching and for the replacement of grants with student loans. It was because, as Pimlott (1993, p 515) notes, it 'took the ideals of social equality and equality of opportunity more seriously than any other part of the British education system' that the OU was able to render as habitual **[[AU: normal? usual?]]** an industrial model of teaching and the further commodification of knowledge. These values were translated by staff at the personal, social, levels where the learning occurred. In secure environments OU tutors and counsellors embodied the university's foundation values as a social democratic counterpoint to communism, while also drawing on modern industrial-scale technology to disseminate enlightened cultural values.

Notes

1. Unpublished interview with Stuart Hall conducted by Hilary Young in 2009.
2. Unpublished interview conducted by Hilary Young in 2009.
3. Unpublished interview conducted by Hilary Young in 2009.
4. Pitchy Breath Theatre, www3.open.ac.uk/near-ypu/south-east/p3.asp.

References

A university of the air, Cmnd 2992 (1966) London: HMSO.

Atkins P. and Beard, J. (2010) *Learning with practitioners. Rationale: frameworks: learning*, Milton Keynes: The Open University.

Benton, W. (1960) 'The Cold War and the liberal arts', Speech, 5 June, University of Chicago, Special Collections Research Center, Box 522, File 17, University of Chicago Library.

Benton, W. (1966) Letter 1966 to C.A. Thompson, Acting Consul General in the British Consulate in New York, 24 February. **[[AU: is this in the U Chicago collection in previous ref? please give all details]]**

Berghahn, V. (2001) *America and the intellectual cold wars in Europe*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Block, A. (2006) 'Harold Wilson, Labour and the machinery of government', *Contemporary British History*, 20(3): 343–62.

Brittan, S. (1964) *The Treasury under the Tories 1951–1964*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Crosland, S. (1982) *Tony Crosland*, London: Jonathan Cape.

Czernecki, I. (2013) 'An intellectual offensive: the Ford Foundation and the destalinization of the Polish social sciences', *Cold War History*, 13(3): 289–310.
Daniel, J. (1998) 'Has the Open University lived up to the ideals of its founders?', Jean Posthuma Memorial Lecture, Association of Open University Graduates AGM, 28 November.
Dorey, P. (2015) '"Well, Harold insists on having it!": the political struggle to establish the Open University, 1965–67', *Contemporary British History*, 29(2): 241–72.
Drake, M. (1972) 'The Open University concept', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 61(242): 155–8.
Earle, R. (2011) 'Prison and university: a tale of two institutions', *Papers from the British Criminology Conference*, 11 (3–6 July): 20–37.
Fisher, R. (2019) 'United Kingdom. Historical perspective: cultural policies and instruments', in Europarat / ERICarts (ed.) *Compendium of cultural policies and trends*, 20th edn, www.culturalpolicies.net.
Forster, W. (1976) 'The higher education of prisoners', Vaughan Paper 21, Department of Adult Education, University of Leicester.
Foucault, M. (1986) 'Of other spaces', trans. J. Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16(spring): 22–7.
Glendinning, M. (2003) 'Teamwork or masterwork? The design and reception of the Royal Festival Hall', *Architectural History*, 46: 277–319.
Hall, S. (1993) 'Thatcherism today', *New Statesman and Society*, 26 November: 14–17.
Hobsbawm, E.J. (1990) 'Goodbye to all that', *Marxism Today*, October: 18–23.
Hollis, P. (1998) *Jennie Lee*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hooper, R. (1974) 'New media in the OU: an international perspective', in J. Tunstall (ed.) *The Open University Opens*, London: Routledge.
Irwin, T. (2008) 'The "inside story": practitioner perspectives on teaching in prison', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 47(5): 512–28.
Jewkes, Y. and Johnston, H. (2007) 'The evolution of prison architecture', in Y. Jewkes (ed.) *Handbook on prisons*, Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing, pp 174–96.
Kezar, A. (2004) 'Obtaining integrity? Reviewing and examining the charter between higher education and society', *Review of Higher Education*, 27(4): 429–59.
King, A. (1963) 'Higher education, professional manpower and the state: reflections on education and professional employment in the USSR', *Minerva*, 1(2).

1 Labour Party (1964) *Let's go with Labour for the New Britain: The Labour*
2 *Party's manifesto for the 1964 general election*, London: Labour Party.
3 Labour Party study group on higher education chaired by Lord Taylor
4 (1963) *The years of crisis: The report of the Labour Party's study group on*
5 *higher education*, London: Labour Party.
6 Lane Fox, M. (2019) Tweet @Marthalanefox, 20 February. **[[AU: is**
7 **this enough for the reader to find it?]]**
8 Le Grand, J. and Bartlett, W. (eds) (1993) *Quasi-markets and social policy*,
9 Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
10 Lunneborg, P. (1997) *OU men: Work through lifelong learning*, Cambridge:
11 Lutterworth.
12 MacArthur, B. (1974) 'An interim history of the Open University', in J.
13 Tunstall (ed.) *The Open University opens*, London: Routledge, pp 3–17.
14 McAtackney, L. (2006) 'The negotiation of identity at shared sites:
15 Long Kesh/Maze Prison site, Northern Ireland', paper presented at
16 the 10th International Seminar of Forum UNESCO – University
17 and Heritage: 'Cultural Landscapes in the 21st Century', Newcastle-
18 upon-Tyne, 11–16 April 2005 (revised July 2006), p 3.
19 *Open Forum* (1976) BBC Radio, 10 July. **[[AU: Radio 1,2,4?]]**
20 *Open Forum* (1978) BBC Radio, 12 August. **[[AU: as above]]**
21 Open University (nd) Open University Charter. www.open.ac.uk/
22 about/main/sites/www.open.ac.uk.about.main/files/files/ecms/
23 web-content/Charter.pdf.
24 Open University (2009a) *Inside News: The Open University Newsletter*
25 *for Secure Environments*, March.
26 Open University (2009b) *The Open University: The first 40 years. A*
27 *celebration of four decades of growth and innovation*, Milton Keynes: The
28 Open University.
29 Open University (2018) *Steps to success*, Milton Keynes: The Open
30 University.
31 Perry, W. (1972) *Report of the Vice-Chancellor to the Council, 1971*,
32 Milton Keynes: The Open University.
33 Perry, W. (1973) *Report of the Vice-Chancellor to the council, 1972*, Milton
34 Keynes: The Open University.
35 Perry, W. (1976) *Open University: A personal account by the first Vice-*
36 *Chancellor*, Milton Keynes: The Open University.
37 Pike, A. and Hopkins, S. (2019) '"Education is transformational":
38 positive identity through prison-based higher education in England
39 and Wales', *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in*
40 *Education*, 4(1): 48–65.
41 Pimlott, B. (1993) *Harold Wilson*, London: HarperCollins.
42

Pratt, J. (1970) 'Gone to lunch: a critical look at the Open University', *Education + Training*, 12(10).

Purcell, H. (2015) *A very private celebrity: The nine lives of John Freeman*, London: Biteback Publishing.

Regan, P. (1996) 'Opening opportunities for students at a disadvantage', presentation of positive practices in the field of lifelong learning, Athens.

Regan, P. (2003) *The Open University in the North: Widening participation in prisons, 2002. An evaluation*, Newcastle: Open University.

Rhodes, R.A.W. (1994) 'The hollowing out of the state: the changing nature of public service in Britain', *Political Quarterly*, 65(2): 138–51.

Robbins, L. (1963) *Higher education: Report of the committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the chairmanship of Lord Robbins*, Cmnd 2154, London: HMSO.

Savage, M. (2011) *Identities and social change in Britain since 1940: The politics of method*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sewart, D. (1975) 'Some observations on the formation of study group', *Teaching at a Distance*, 2: 2–6.

Simpson, O. (2002a) *Supporting students in online open and distance learning*, 2nd edn, London: Routledge.

Simpson, O. (2002b) 'Doing it hard', in G. Crosling and G. Webb (eds) *Supporting student learning: Case studies, experience and practice*, London: Kogan Page, pp 34–40.

Simpson, O. (2006) 'Mapping the work of the Open University in prisons', National Institute of Adult Continuing Education paper. **[[AU: place of publication?]]**

Talulawa, R. (2003) 'International aid agencies, learner-centred pedagogy and political democratisation: a critique', *Comparative Education*, 39(1): 7–26.

The Times Higher Education Supplement (1971) 3 December. **[[AU: add article title if poss]]**

The Times Higher Education Supplement (1966) 4 March. **[[AU: add article title if poss]]**

The Times Higher **[[AU: *Education Supplement*?]]** (2002) 27 September. **[[AU: add article title if poss]]**

Watts, J.H. (2010) 'Teaching a distance higher education curriculum behind bars: challenges and opportunities', *Open Learning: the journal of open, distance and e-Learning*, 25(1): 57–64.

Weinbren, D. (2012) '"Filled with good social democrats": the Open University and the development of the knowledge economy, 1969–1989', *Journal of the World University Forum*, 5(2): 99–112.

Weinbren, D. (2014a) ‘Asa Briggs and the opening up of the Open University’, in M. Taylor (ed.) *The age of Asa: Lord Briggs, public life and history in Britain since 1945*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp 248–66.
Weinbren, D. (2014b) *The Open University: A history*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Weinbren, D. (2018) ‘Prisoner students: building bridges, breaching walls’, in J. Burkett (ed.) *Students in twentieth-century Britain and Ireland*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp 45–75.
Wilson, H. (1963) *Labour's plan for science: Reprint of speech by the Rt. Hon. Harold Wilson, MP, leader of the Labour party at the annual conference Scarborough, Tuesday, 1 October*, London: Labour Party.
Wilson, H. (1964) *Purpose in politics: Selected speeches by Rt. Hon. Harold Wilson*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.