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'Student on hold': a poetic exploration into part-time distance learner experiences of deferral

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'Student on hold': a poetic exploration into part-time distance learner experiences of deferral.

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Ingrid (36, employed single parent)

*Suited my lifestyle, suits my work
best option for me*

*Something happened,
always something
We want to be educated
but we have a life*

*I needed time, more time
extra time to finish
enough time to finish*

*A huge load lifted
I had enough time*

Open University students are typically mature and part-time, fitting their studies around employment, family and other commitments. Aware that life events may impact their studies, a deferral process allows students to pause and subsequently return to study on the following presentation of their module. Interviews with sixteen students explored the triggers and impacts of having a break from study through deferral.

Poetic inquiry was used to analyse the data, and selected participant words used to produce transcript poems (Faulkner, 2017). The resulting 'poem-like' representations (Lahman, Richard and Teman, 2019) give authentic voice to the participants and help to portray emotional aspects of their experience (Carr, 2003).

Selected poems presented here focus on the decision to defer, which most participants found challenging. All names are pseudonyms.

Carr, J. M. (2003) Poetic expressions of vigilance, *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol 13, pp. 1324-1331.

Faulkner, S. (2017) Poetic Inquiry. Craft, Method and Practice. 2nd ed. Routledge, Abingdon, UK.

Lahman, M.K., Richard, V.M., and Teman, E.D. (2019) ish: How to write poemish (research) poetry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol 25 (2) pp.215-227.

Background image: Sunset over the channel, Linda Robson

Louise (43, disabled, employed parent)

*It was going extremely well
swimmingly
fantastic*

*Dad passed away
on my daughter's birthday*

*didn't want to stop
didn't want to give up
guilt
upset*

*absolutely no way
no way I was not coming back.*

George (40, self-employed graduate)

*I've put it on hold
not really bothered
Didn't need a piece of paper
it was just for me*

*It is my choice
not my priority
Nothing was riding on it
it was just for me*

John (28, employed, divorcing parent)

*Getting bored with what I was doing
I needed a degree
Wasn't what I envisaged
Wasn't what I thought it would be*

*Couldn't carry on with my studies
needed possibility
to get my life back on track
sort my head to study*

Maggie (52, employed, job change)

*Life was getting busy,
it just all got too much.
The time, the inclination
too far behind, can't catch up*

*The relief of deferring
The feeling of failure*

A student on hold