

Address by

**Lord Geoffrey Crowther**  
Foundation Chancellor

At the formal inauguration of  
**The Open University**

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"To be chosen as the Chancellor of any university is a great honour. To be named as the Foundation Chancellor of this unique institution is a distinction of which I have difficulty in thinking myself worthy. But since the command comes from the Queen in Council, I have accepted it with alacrity and with a deep sense of gratitude for being given so elevated a platform from which to observe the course of a great experiment.

This is the **Open** University.

We are open, first, as to **people**.

Not for us the carefully regulated escalation from one educational level to the next by which the traditional universities establish their criteria for admission. "We took it as axiomatic," said the Planning Committee, "that no formal academic qualifications would be required for registration as a student." Anyone could try his or her hand, and only failure to progress adequately would be a bar to continuation of studies.

The first, and most urgent task before us is to cater for the many thousands of people, fully capable of a higher education, who, for one reason or another, do not get it, or do not get as much of it as they can turn to advantage, or as they discover, sometimes too late, that they need. Only in recent years have we come to realise how many such people there are, and how large are the gaps in educational provision through which they can fall. The existing system, for all its expansion, misses and leaves aside a great unused reservoir of human talent and potential.

Men and women drop out through failures in the system, through disadvantages of their environment, through mistakes of their own judgement, through sheer bad luck. These are our primary material. To them we offer a further opportunity. Almost we can say, like the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the open door."

But if this were all, we could hardly call ourselves a university. This is not simply an educational rescue mission - though that is our first task and we do not decry it. But we also aim wider and higher. Wherever there is an unprovided need for higher education, supplementing the existing provision, there is our constituency. There are no limits on persons.

We are open as to **places**. This University has no cloisters - a word meaning closed. Hardly even shall we have a campus. By a very happy chance, our only local habitation will be in the new city that is to bear two of the widest-ranging names in the history of English thought, Milton Keynes. But this is only where the tip of our toe touches ground; the rest of the University will be disembodied and airborne. From the start it will flow all over the United Kingdom.

But it is already clear that the University will rapidly become one of the most potent and persuasive, and profitable, or our invisible exports. Wherever the English language is spoken or understood, or used as a medium of study, and wherever there are men and women seeking to develop their individual potentialities beyond the limits of the local provision (and I have defined a large part of the world), there we can offer our help. This may well prove to be the most potent form of external aid that this country can offer in the years to come. The interest of those all over the world who are wrestling with the problem of making educational bricks without straw has already been aroused, and before long the Open University and its courses, electronically recorded and reproduced, will be for many millions of people their introduction to the riches of the English language and of Britain's heritage of culture.

There are no boundaries of space.

We are open as to **methods**. The original name was the University of the Air. I am glad that it was abandoned, for even the air would be too confining. We start, it is true, in dependence on, and in grateful partnership with, the British Broadcasting Corporation. But already the development of technology is marching on, and I predict that, before long, actual broadcasting will form only a small part of the University's output. The world is caught in a communications revolution, the effects of which will go beyond those of the industrial revolution of two centuries ago. Then the great advance was the invention of machines to multiply the potency of men's muscles. Now the great new advance is the invention of machines to multiply the potency of men's minds. As the steam engine was to the first revolution, so the computer is to the second. It has been said that the addition of the traditional university to the lecture room is a sign of its inability to adjust to the development of the printing press. That, of course, is unjust. But at least no such reproach will be levelled at the Open University in the communications revolution. Every new form of human communication will be examined to see how it can be used to raise and broaden the level of human understanding.

There is no restriction on techniques.

We are open, finally, as to **ideas**. It has been said that there are two aspects of education, both necessary. One regards the individual human mind as a vessel, of varying capacity, into which is to be poured as much it will hold of the knowledge and experience by which human society lives and moves. This is the Martha of education - and we shall have plenty of these tasks to perform. But the Mary regards the human mind rather as a fire which has to set alight and blown with the divine afflatus. This also we take as our ambition.

What a happy chance it is that we start on this task, in this very week when the Universe has opened. The limits not only of explorable space, but of human understanding, are infinitely wider than we have believed. I am reminded of Milton's description of an even greater return from Outer Space with mission accomplished. "The Planets in their stations listening stood, while the bright Pomp ascended jubilant. 'Open ye everlasting gates,' they sung, 'Open ye heavens your living doors. Let in the great Creator, from his work returned; Magnificent, His six days work, a World.'"