



Transcript for David Puttnam Interview

Lord Puttnam, Chancellor, The Open University, September 2007

Lord Puttnam:

The arrival of digital technologies alters everything in terms of what we used to talk of as broadcasting. Essentially, it is no longer broadcasting, it is now, well a horrible phrase that gets used called 'narrow casting'. It is the ability to address small, medium and large audiences according to the message that you want to offer and at the time that the audience wishes to receive it.

I think that the digital opportunity offers the opportunity for every single student to effectively become a co-creator of the materials that inform the next generation of students, and that's a fantastically attractive proposition. And the notion that you're not just a passive learner, that everything you learn, and everything you observe from what you've learned, or everything you learn from what you've learned, take away from what you've learned, can be fed back into this kind of, if you like, a giant millstream of learning, to re-emerge somewhere else, at some other time, to enhance someone else's learning.

And the fact that the whole learning process can take place off a handheld device, wherever you are, whenever you've got time. And, frankly, if the OU can't take advantage of this extraordinary opportunity the digital environment's brought, then shame on it. But it will. I'm absolutely confident of that.

One of the more interesting challenges and opportunities for the OU is the way in which it interacts with the private sector. The private sector is not going to keep its paws off education.

But on the other hand, the private sector doesn't know how to do education - it will need crucial strategic partners. The key role of the OU is to maintain the educational ethos within all this, within this mix. Not to roll over and just be a facility which is used by Murdoch or Microsoft or Google but in fact to sustain the learning ethos, to sustain the moral, if you like, position of learning within society.

My advice to the OU would be to enter into very productive nurturing non-exclusive arrangements with those organisations which ticked three important boxes. One is that the platform they were offering was suited to the excellent delivery of the OU's learning output. The second would be that the price point, which was fixed for that offering, was something which the core target audience, if you like, for the OU's learning ambitions was able to afford and achieve. And the last one would be that there was some kind of underpinning, moral underpinning, for the reason why the partner was in business, and the reason why the partner had decided to go into business with the OU. You can't create partnerships when people have got a completely different set of objectives, so there must be some harmony of objective.