



Talk 4. Learning to the top and enjoying every minute

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 Dr Lesley Boyd, Affiliated Researcher

Learning to the top and enjoying every minute

Ageing Well Public Talk

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies

Dr Inma Alvarez, Director of Postgraduate Research Studies

Dr Lesley Boyd, Affiliated Researcher

13th December 2023



Overview

01

Life-long learning: The ultimate academic challenge

02

Motivations for doing a doctoral research project later in life

03

Rewards (and challenges)

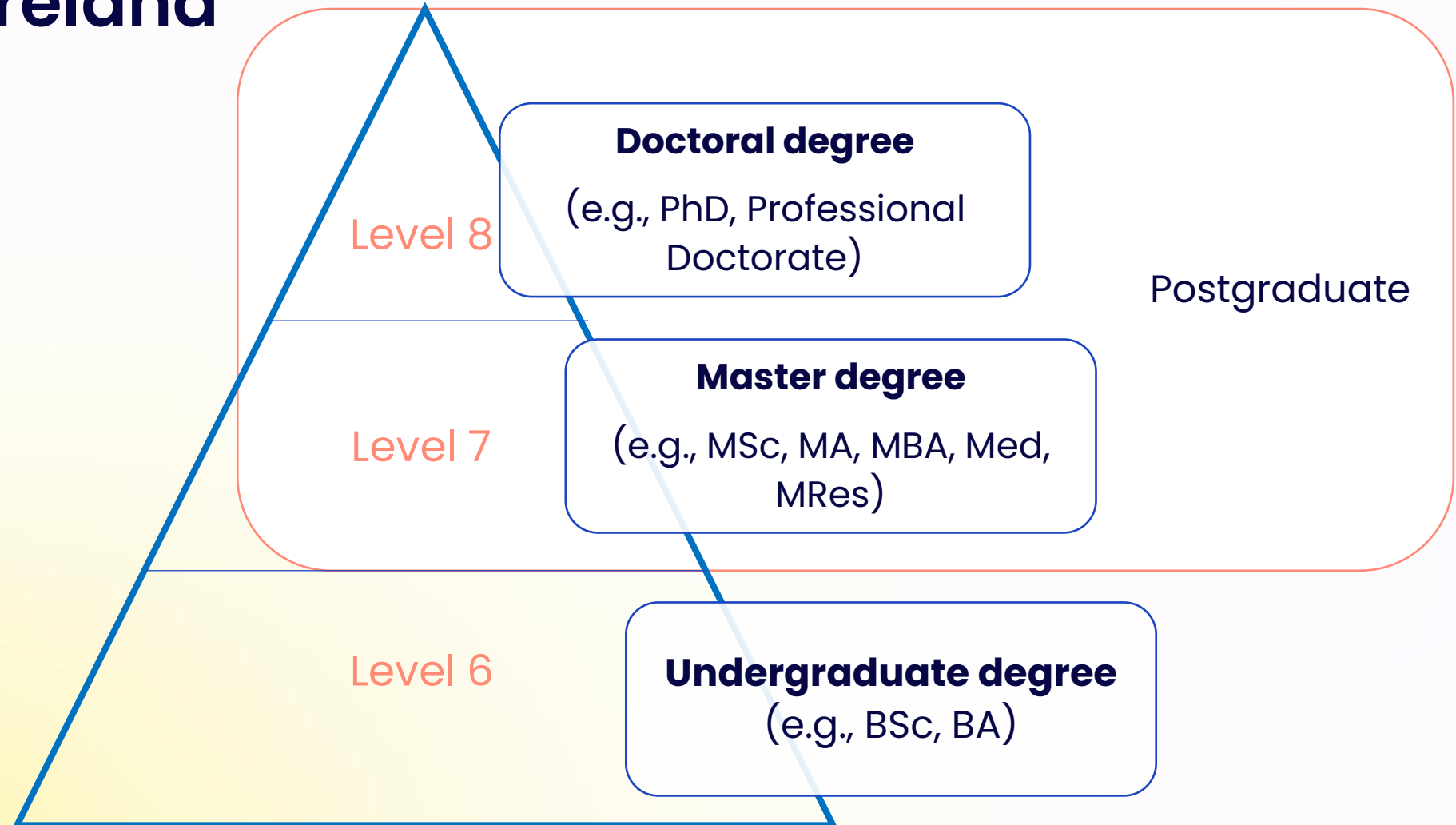
04

Final reflections and where to go next

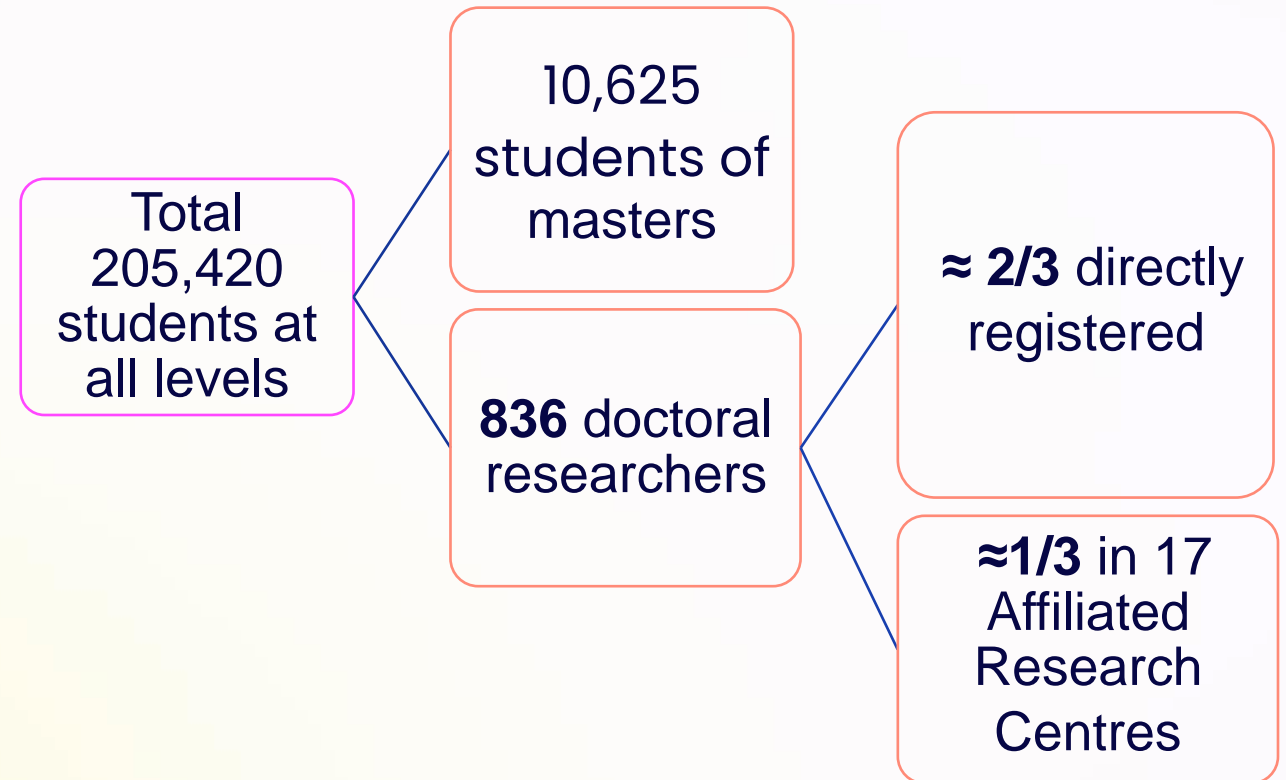
Life-long learning: The ultimate academic challenge



Qualification stages: in England, Wales and Northern Ireland



Open University figures 2020/21: student numbers

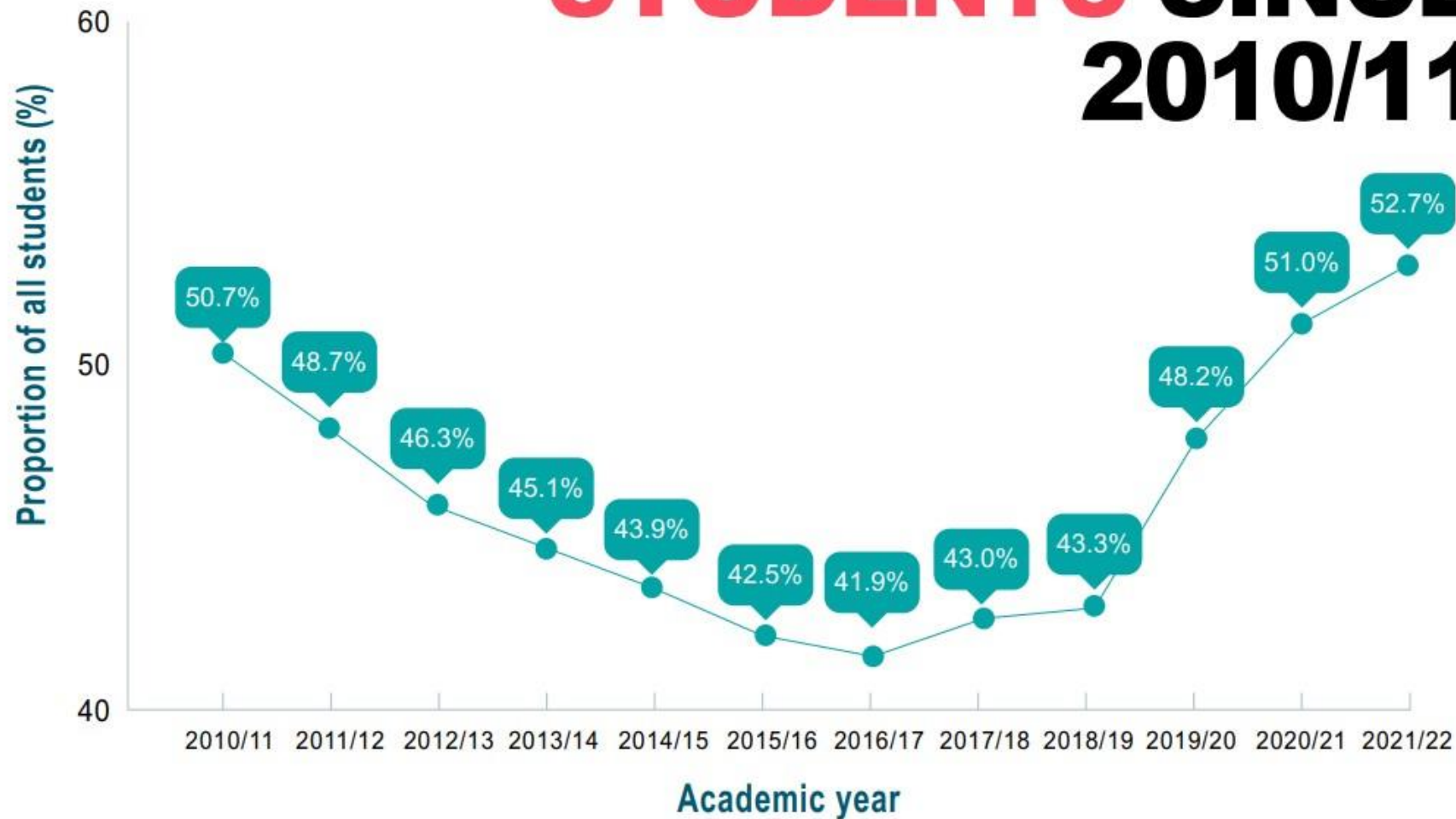


Open University figures 2020/21: age profile

Age	Undergraduates	Postgraduates
45-54	11%	23%
55-64	5%	10%
65+	2%	4%

14% (1,604.54) of Postgraduates are over 55 years old.

PROPORTION OF MATURE STUDENTS SINCE 2010/11



Q1

**Who counts as mature-age in
higher education?**

Defining who counts as mature-age

UK

Those who enter higher education at the age of 21 or over (Office for Students, 2021).
Students aged 22 and over. Top age category 36 and over (AdvanceHE, 2023).

Australia

Mature age in education refers to 35–64 years old (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2000).

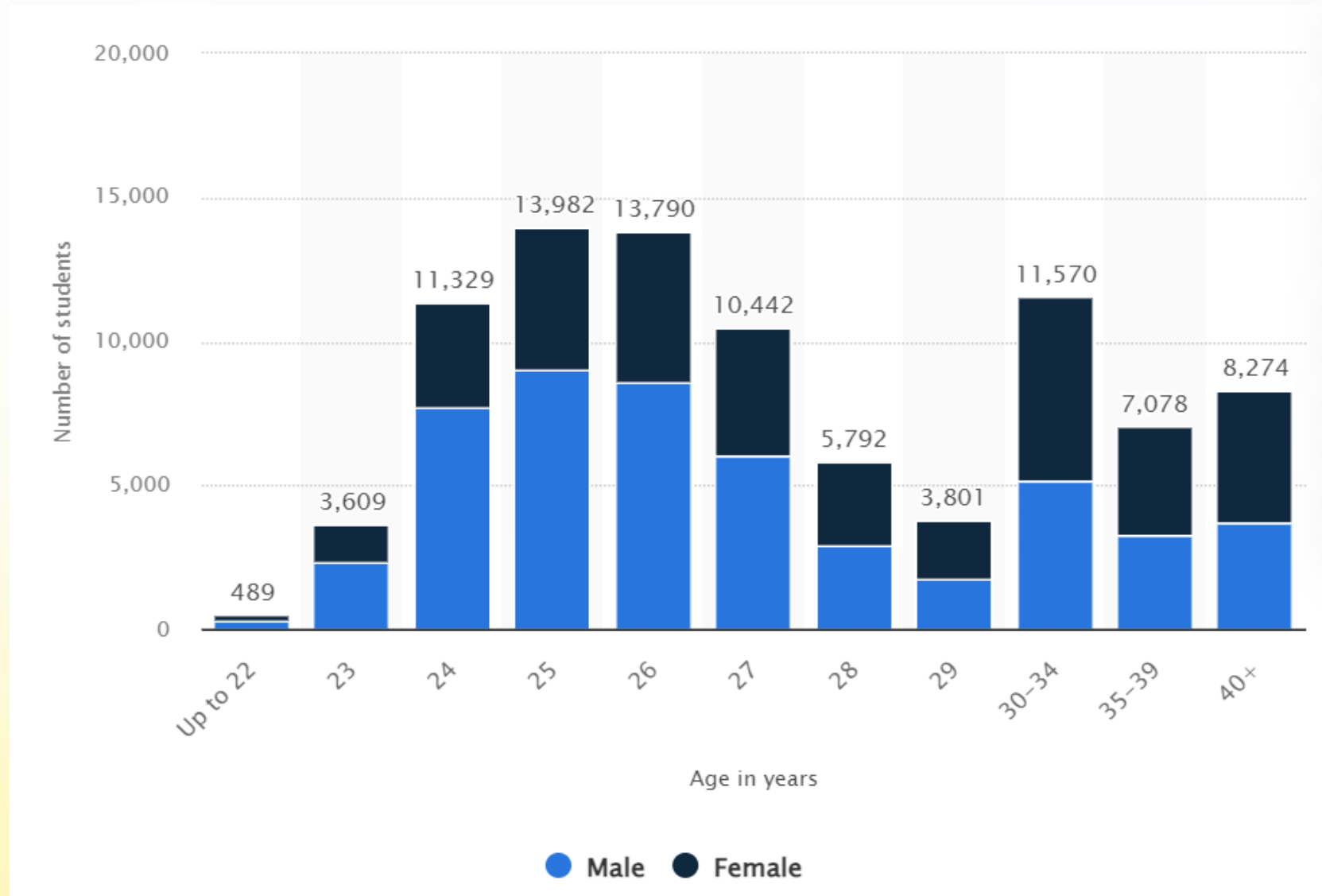
USA

A study defined 'older student doctorate recipients' as those who completed their BA at or over 25 (Brazziel, 1992).

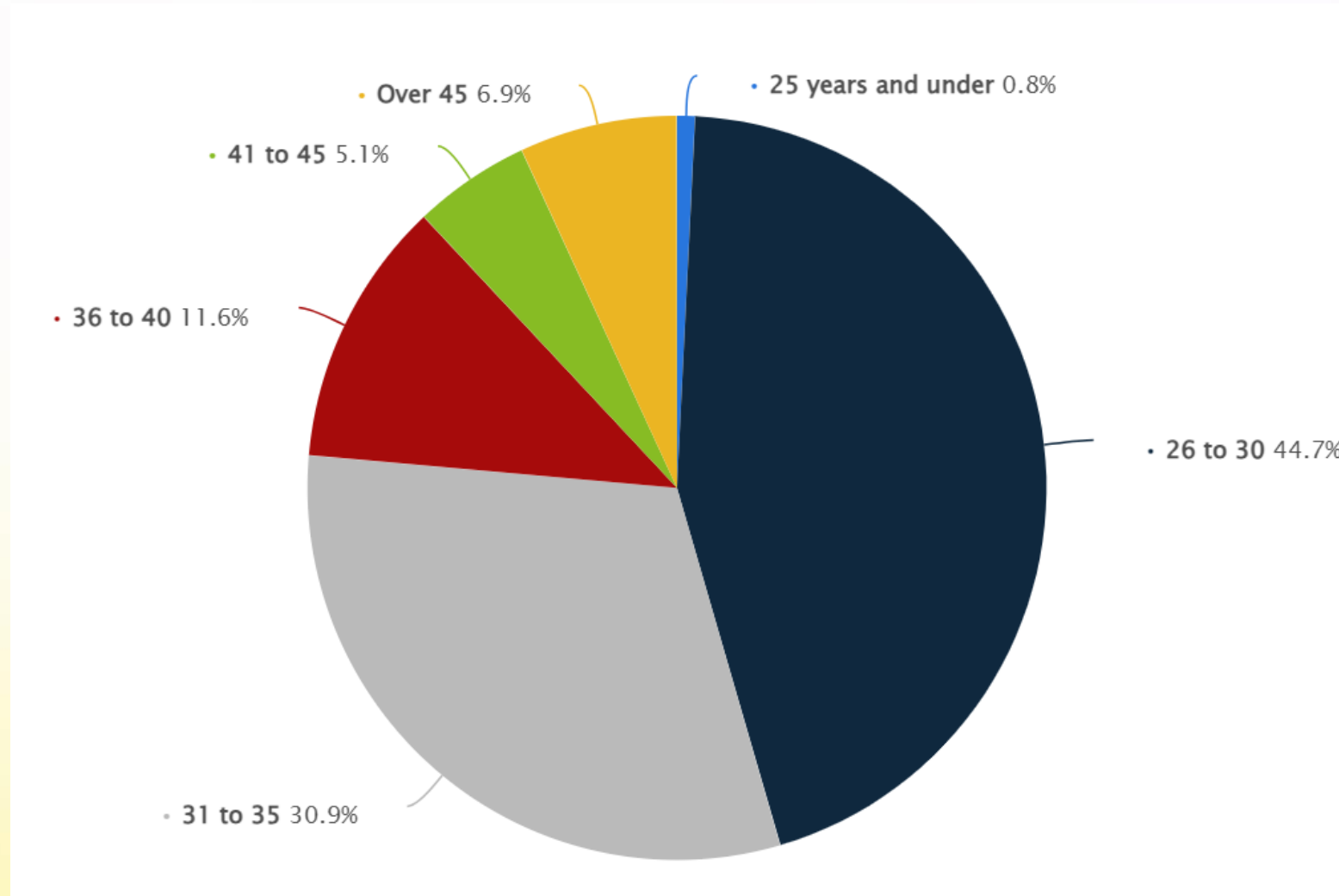
Our focus for this presentation is on
55+ years old doctoral researchers

Doctoral researchers in Russia in 2021

Total enrolments
90,200



Doctoral researchers in the USA in 2021



Q2

**What discipline attracts more
mature-age students?**

Differences in age by field

Education PhD graduates are older

“This is because they typically have many more years of first-hand experience teaching in a high school or another educational environment. This delays the onset of their PhD admission significantly compared to other fields.” (Stapleton, 2023b)

Some of our current mature-age doctoral researchers

Nash Sher-Gill (71, teacher)

A study of the usage and 'under-usage' of Attendance Centres for young offenders

Marilyn Long (73, teacher)

Autistic students and online higher education

Some of our mature-age doctorate holders

Dr Lesley Fearn (59, secondary school English teacher)

English as a Foreign Language and Online Community Projects in Secondary School Education

Dr Pauline Lyseight-Jones (62, education consultant)

Developing teacher educators in Uganda using a mentoring approach

Dr Linda Plowright-Pepper (63, former CEO of Sports Leaders UK)

Children's experiences of physical activity

Dr Madeleine Pilcher (71, Early Years teacher)

Translanguaging within an Early Years setting in England

Winner of the AOUG Chancellor Baroness Boothroyd Award for Citizenship, Identities and Governance

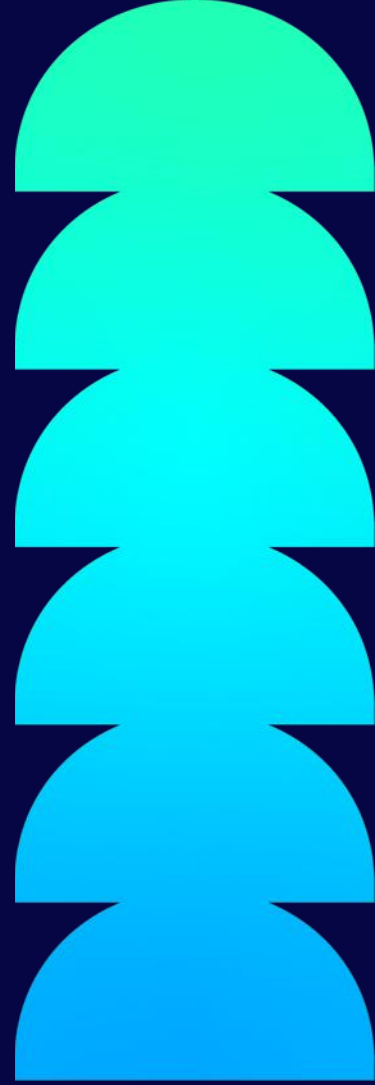
Dr Allan Gwyndyr Meredith

Primary school governors in a deprived South Wales community



"My experience shows it's never too late."

**Doing a doctoral
research project
later in life**



02

Usual key output of a doctorate

Written thesis

at the OU is 100,000 words maximum (approx. 300 – 400 pages)

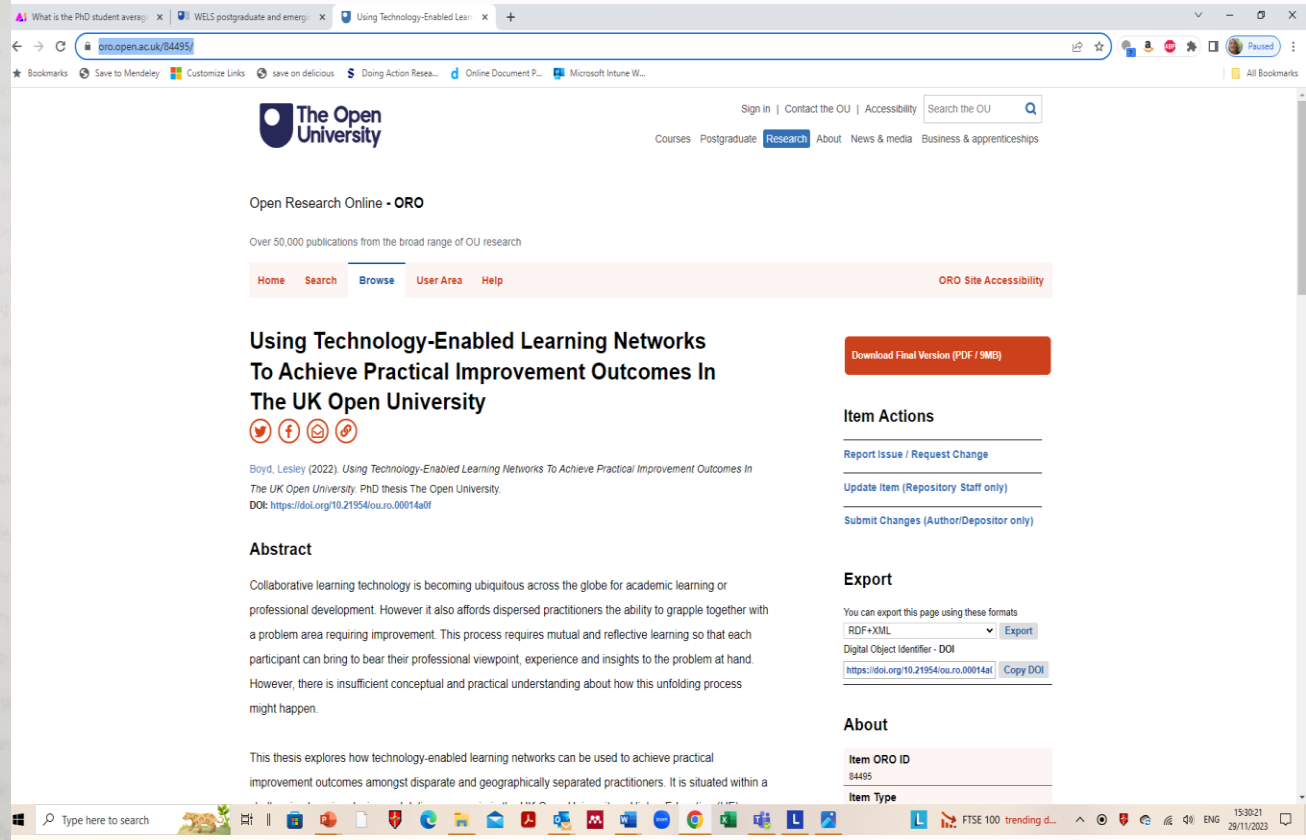
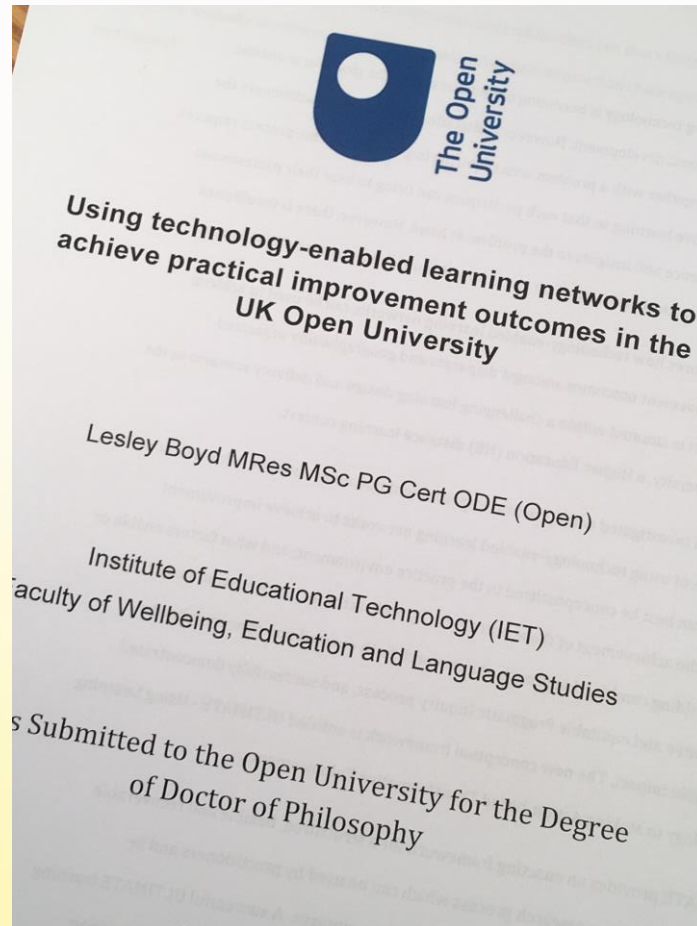
No longer needs to be a bound shelf copy – now electronic submission



OU Theses archive

Completed and examined theses are available in Open Research Online (ORO)

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/84495/>



Examination

Viva voce – in person, online or hybrid



External examiner, doctoral student, internal examiner, viva chair

Photo taken by Dr Carina Bossu, Lead Supervisor

What could I expect in doctoral study at the OU?

- **Supervision:** academic supervisors; regular meetings
- **Third Party Monitor (TPM):** pastoral support
- **Doctoral training programme:** development of research skills
- **Faculty research events:** briefings, seminars, PGR conference
- **Academic writing support:** PACE programme
- **World class Library:** electronic and physical collections
- **Social events and spaces:** Postgraduate Common Room, competitions
- **Funding allowance:** to attend conferences in UK or overseas

Q3

**Why would you do a doctorate
later in life?**

Motivations of mature-age students to do a doctorate

A study of those starting doctorate at 35 years-old or above in Australia and China:

"...mature-aged students possessed a mixture of personal, interpersonal, and professional motives for embarking on doctoral studies."

(Fung et al., 2017, p. 188)

Eunice Gribbin's motivations (at 70 years old)

"I see it more as an opportunity to culminate one's life's work to give meaning to future generations [...] My reasons for enrolling in a PhD were simple and clear : as an educator, I understood the importance of sharing knowledge. I wanted to recognize and disseminate my unique perspective of congenital bowel disorders as a nurse, an educator, a mother and founder of a support group and share it in the hopes of changing attitudes."

(Brabazon et al., 2023, p. 244)

Lesley's motivations

- Make a lasting contribution to the world; help with societal challenges
- Underpin my accumulated professional practice with academic rigour
- Preserve and reflect on my professional career
- Enhance my later life intellectual and social connections
- Live on my own terms and by my own values
- Add to a portfolio of later life income opportunities
- Achieve a sense of 'self-actualisation'.

Q4

**How can maturity help with
doctoral study?**

Advantages to being a mature-age student

Stapleton (2023a)

- Life experience
- A better understanding of the field
- Professional experience to draw upon
- Better networks

Templeton (2021)

- A repertoire of skills and knowledge from employment
- Articulate, literate and self-esteemed
- Self-sufficient in their ability to learn

Rewards (and challenges)

Things to consider before embarking on a doctorate

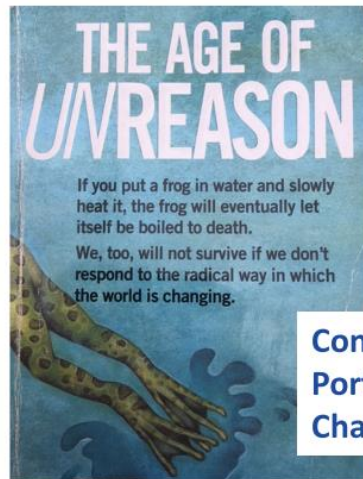
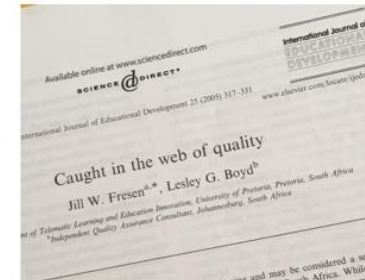
- **Level of education:** previous qualifications and research training
- **Time to study:** full-time 37 hours / part-time 18.5 hours a week
- **Length of study:** full-time 3-4 years / part-time 4-8 years
- **Income and funding:** self-funded, studentship, doctoral loan
- **Family and friends:** relationships and caring responsibilities
- **Health:** existing or emerging health issues
- **Work commitments:** pressure of job, financial contribution
- **Life events:** expect the unexpected!

Lesley's previous experience and qualifications

Independent consultancy in UK and South Africa. Collaborative quality improvement. Portfolio life inspired by Charles Handy.



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA



BRITISH AIRWAYS

People
Processes
Systems

Consultancy
Portfolio Life
Charles Handy

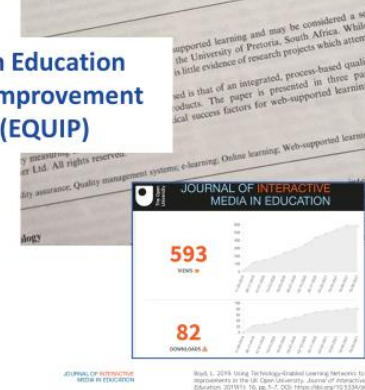


MSc Business
Management
Systems

H800 from Johannesburg
Masters in Research Skills
PhD

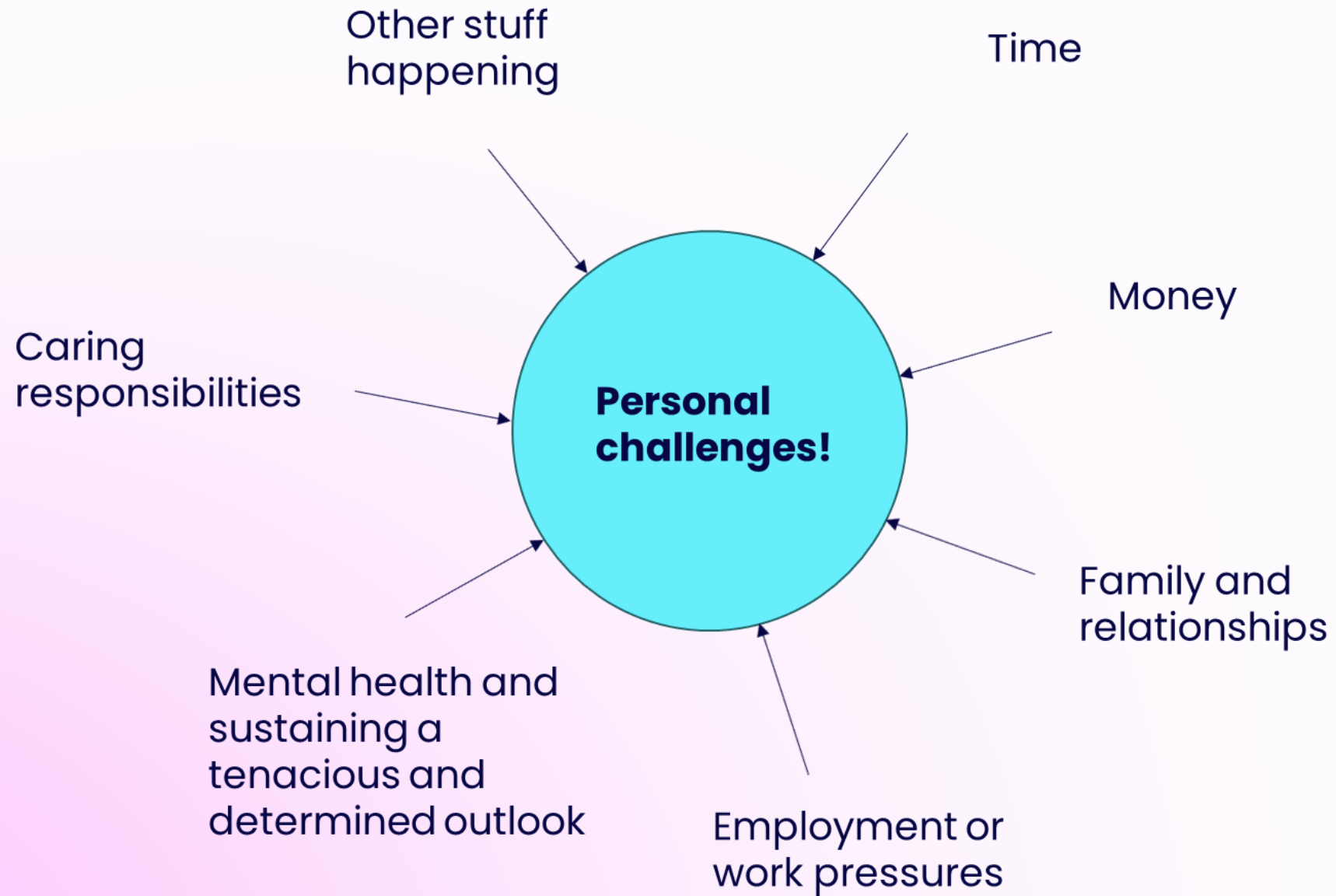


Ethiopian Education
Quality Improvement
Program (EQUIP)



ARTICLE
Using Technology-Enabled Learning Networks to Drive Module Improvements in the UK Open University
Lesley Boyd



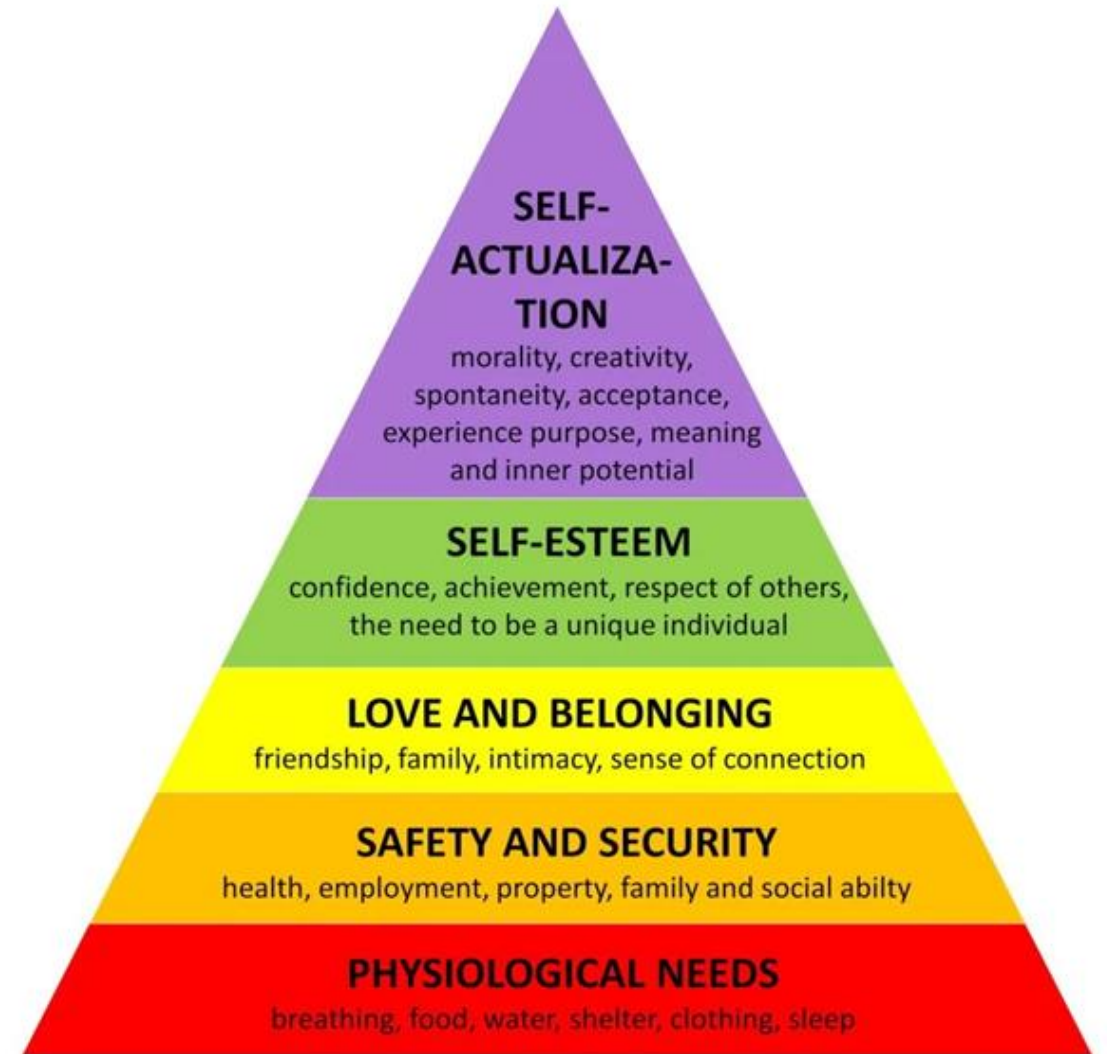




A life-changing experience

“The challenges arising in a PhD – and they can be very different depending on what time of life you attempt it – can take you literally across all the hierarchy levels, which can be quite profound as a life-changing experience!!”

(Lesley, July 2019)



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2023)

Q5

Is it worth it?

How does it feel?

Lesley's graduation ceremony

Milton Keynes Theatre, 15th March 2023, **Aged 61**

Video link:

<https://x.com/lesleyboyd/status/1636655548111134720?s=20>

“Profound pride for myself and my son. Looking forward to future professional development and personal growth in my 60s and 70s.”

An invitation

Read and listen to some of the life stories by our mature doctorate holders about the personal and professional impact of the doctorate: [EdD journeys](#)

Visit the exhibition on the stories and experiences of twelve of the OU's first PhD graduates from 1973–79. [PhD Pioneers: The Lived Experiences of the Open University's First PhD Graduates](#)

Final reflections and where to go next



Final reflections

1. Do you know anyone doing a doctorate? Are they mature?
2. Have you ever dreamt of doing a doctorate?
3. What would you have to overcome?
4. What would help you get started?
5. What would it mean to you when you complete?

Where to go next?

- Read about the research areas, prospectus and application process: <https://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees>
- For example, Ageing and Later Life as a research area: <https://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/topic/ageing-and-later-life>
- Attend an open day: WELS Faculty is in mid-October annually
- If you are close, you can come to the Walton Hall campus and the Library
- Talk to your family, and assess your life and financial situation
- Read the writing a research proposal information on OpenLearn: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/postgraduate-studies/writing-your-research-proposal> (WELS Faculty)
- Prepare some draft proposal ideas
- Look for possible academic supervisors and approach them

References

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Brabazon, T., Gribbin, E. and Sharp, C. (2023) 'The Stories We Tell Ourselves about the Doctorate, and their Consequences: Ageism and the PhD', *International journal of social sciences & educational studies*, 10(3), pp. 232–253. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.23918/ijsses.v10i3p232>

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Stapleton, Andy (2023b). What is the PhD student average age? Too late for your doctorate? *ACADEMIA INSIDER*, 26 April 2023. Available at: <https://academiainsider.com/what-is-the-phd-student-average-age-too-late-for-your-doctorate/>

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Templeton, R. (2021). 'Factors likely to sustain a mature-age student to completion of their doctorate', *Australian journal of adult learning*, 61(1), pp. 45–62.

Any questions?



Ageing Well series of Public Talks 2023/24 - topics

Are we prepared to live longer? (Jitka Vseteckova & Rachel Turner) **September 13th 2023**

MENOPAUSE and changing attitudes to what people want from this stage of life (Catherine Pestano & Lyndsey Simpson) **October 18th 2023**

Taking Control of Dying (Barbara Gale & Victoria Hedges) **November 22nd 2023**

Learning to the top and enjoying every minute (Inma Alvarez) **December 13th 2023**

Memory and spending time outdoors (Jitka Vseteckova & Ellie Broad) **January 24th 2024**

Anything but being sedentary (Declan Ryan) **February 21st 2024**

Life, thriving, not just surviving (Marina Postletwaite-Bowler & Lynne Watson) **March 13th 2024**

Ways to eat well and stay well (Sinead Eccles) **April 17th 2024**

Making friends in blue and green spaces (Grainne O'Connor & Yoseph Araya) **May 22nd 2024**

Culture in language learning for older adults (Natalia Balyasnikova) **June 19th 2024**

Delivering inclusive health services for ethnic minority older people (Rohini Sharma Joshi) **July 10th 2024**

Ageing Well series of Public Talks

“Being mindful of eating well, hydration, physical activity, learning new things and social connections can delay the decline caused by ageing.

Come and join us for the series of public talks with the title “Ageing Well”



Dr. Jitka Vseteckova
Senior Lecturer, Health and Social Care





Ageing Well Public Talks

RESOURCES

Commendation	Rationale
Take time for cognitively stimulating activities that you've always enjoyed.	Continuing favourite activities can ensure sustainability of cognitive stimulation. Long-term exposure to cognitive stimulation may be needed for practical functional benefits.
Add some new cognitive challenges, as your time and enjoyment permit	Trying new activities may enhance brain plasticity by requiring new learning or development of new cognitive strategies MUSIC LESSONS, LEARNING NEW LANGUAGE, AQUA

Recommendation	Rationale
Aim to engage in cognitively stimulating activities several times a week or more...generate some “ <i>mental sweat</i> .”	Current knowledge does not permit a prescription for how often or how long individuals should engage in cognitively stimulating activities. However, epidemiologic studies suggest that more is better, within clinically reasonable limits.
Be aware that there is no one cognitive activity, or combination of activities, that is uniquely good for reducing AD risk.	Many different types of cognitively stimulating activities have been associated with preserved cognitive skill. There are no data yet to show that cognitive activities prevent or delay AD.
Social interactions are a great way to stimulate the mind.	Group training of cognitive skills has been shown to be effective in sharpening specific cognitive skills, and broader social networks have been associated with reduced AD risk.

Summary of related resources to The Ageing Well Public Talk Series

Podcasts

- Vseteckova J & King J (2020) COVID-19 Interview podcast for The Retirement Café: '[Ageing Well Under Lockdown](#)'
- Vseteckova J & Broad E (2020) Podcast – Open University & The Parks Trust [Keep Me Walking – researching with people living with dementia and their carers](#) –
- Vseteckova J (2020) Podcast – [Areas of research with The Open University](#)
- Broad E, Methley A & Vseteckova J (2021) Podcast OU & The Parks Trust & Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust – [Spotter sheet and mindful walking](#).
- Vseteckova J, Methley A, Broad E (2021) Podcast OU & The Parks Trust & Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust [Preventing brain decline while ageing](#)



Methley A, Broad E, Vseteckova J (2021) Podcast OU & The Parks Trust & Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust [Walking therapy](#)

Vseteckova J, Methley A, Broad (2021) Podcast OU & The Parks Trust & Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust [Understanding our memory](#)

Araya Y, Broad E, Vseteckova J (2022) [Engaging with our environment](#)

Joannidi H, Araya Y, Broad E & Vseteckova J (2022) [Sense of self during aging: how mindfulness and nature can help](#)

The above podcasts can be also seen on [The Parks Trust YouTube Channel](#)



Vseteckova J (2020) [Ageing Well Public Talks Series](#)

Vseteckova J (2019) [5 reasons why exercising outdoors is great for people who have dementia](#)

Vseteckova J (2019) [Depression, mood and exercise](#)

Vseteckova J (2019) [Five Pillars for Ageing Well](#)

Vseteckova J (2020) [Ageing Brain](#)

Methley A & Vseteckova J & Jones K (2020) [**Green & Blue & Outdoor spaces**](#)

Vseteckova J, Borgstrom E, Whitehouse A, Kent A, Hart A (2021) [**Advance Care Planning \(ACP\)**](#)

Vseteckova J (2020) [**Walking the Parks with The OU and The Parks Trust**](#)

Vseteckova J, Methley A, Broad E (2021) [**Understanding our memory**](#)

Araya Y , Broad E, Vseteckova J (2022) [**Engaging with our environment**](#)



Vseteckova J (2022) [Pharmacotherapy while ageing](#)

Joannidi H, Araya Y, Broad E & Vseteckova J (2022) [Sense of Self during ageing – how mindfulness and nature can help](#)

Mehta S (2022) [Medicines and personalisation while ageing](#)

Gale B (2022) [How can we prepare for death while ageing?](#)

Gale B (2022) [Valuing death at home: making preparations](#)



Hedges V & Vseteckova J (2023)

[What should I expect when I am nearing the end of my life?](#)

Joannidi H, Araya Y, Broad E & Vseteckova J (2022)

[Sense of self during aging: how mindfulness and nature can help](#)

Mehta S, Vseteckova J (2023) **[Ageing, health inequalities and person centred care](#)**

Mehta S, Vseteckova J (2023) **[Ageing, health inequalities and integrated approach to care](#)**

Araya Y, Broad E, Vseteckova J (2023) **[Ageing well by connecting and learning about nature outdoors](#)**



Care and caring related

Vseteckova J, (2020) [How to age well, while self-isolating](#)

Vseteckova J, (2020) [SHORT FILM - Ageing Well in Self-Isolation](#)

Vseteckova J, (2020) [ANIMATION - Keeping healthy in Self-Isolation](#)

Vseteckova J et al (2020)

[COVID-19 The effects of self-isolation and lack of physical activity on carers](#)

Taverner P, Larkin M, Vseteckova J, et al. (2020) [Supporting adult carers during COVID-19 pandemic](#)



Robb M, Penson M, Vseteckova J, et al. (2020) [Young carers, COVID-19 and physical activity](#)

Penson M, Vseteckova J et al. (2020) [Older Carers, COVID-19 and Physical Activity](#)

Vseteckova J & Methley A (2020) [Acceptance Commitment Therapy \(ACT\) to help carers in challenging COVID-19 times](#)



[AGEING WELL PUBLIC TALK SERIES WEBSITE](#)

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['Ageing Well Public Talks' Series 2022/2023](#) repository on ORDO Collections

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[Midlife MOT OpenLearn Course](#)

OpenLearnCreate Course on ['Ageing Well' 2019/2020](#)

[Home exercise no equipment – no problem](#) *Blog*

Integrated Care Northamptonshire



Leadership
Centre



Connected



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Care Academy



Public Health
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