

Ageing Well Public Talk Series 2023_24

Talk 4. Learning to the top and enjoying every minute

Dr Inma Alvarez, Director of Postgraduate Research Studies

Dr Lesley Boyd, Affiliated Researcher

School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies

The Open University

Slide 1: Overview

1. Life-long learning: The ultimate academic challenge
2. Motivations for doing a doctoral research project later in life.
3. Rewards (and challenges)
4. Final reflections and where to go next.

Slide 2: **Life-long learning: The ultimate academic challenge**

Slide 3: **Qualification stages: in England, Wales and Northern Ireland**

- Level 6 - **Undergraduate degree** (e.g., BSc, BA)

Postgraduate

- Level 7 - **Master degree** (e.g., MSc, MA, MBA, Med, MRes)
- Level 8 - **Doctoral degree** (e.g., PhD, Professional Doctorate)

Slide 4: **Open University figures 2020/21: student numbers.**

Largest- university in the UK. Total 205,420 students at all levels:

- 10,625 students of masters
- 836 doctoral researchers - two thirds directly registered.
- one third in 17 Affiliated Research Centres.

Slide 5 : **Open University figures 2020/21: age profile**

- Age 45 – 54 Undergraduates 11% , Postgraduates 23%
- Age 55 -65 Undergraduates 5% , Postgraduates 10%
- Age 65+ Undergraduates 2% , Postgraduates 4%
- 14% (1,604.54) of Postgraduates are over 55 years old.

Slide 6: **Proportion of Mature Students Since 2010/11**

- 2010/11 -50.7%
- 2011/12 – 48.7%
- 2012/13 – 46.3%
- 2013/14 – 45.1%
- 2014/15 – 43.9%

- 2015/16 – 42.5%
- 2016/17 – 41.9%
- 2017/18 – 43.0%
- 2018/19 – 43.3%
- 2019/20 – 48.2%
- 2020/21 – 51.0%
- 2021/22 – 52.7%

Slide 7: **Q1 Who counts as mature age in higher education?**

Slide 8: **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.

Slide 9: **Doctoral researchers in Russia in 2021**

- Age -Up to 22 -489 students
- Age- 23 -3609 students
- Age 24 -11329 students
- Age 25 -13982 students
- Age 26 -13790 students
- Age 27 -10442 students
- Age 28 -5792 students
- Age 29 -3801 students
- Age 30-34 -11570 students
- Age 35-39 -7078 students
- Age 40+ -8274 students

[Statista Research Department](#), 10 May 2023

Slide 10: Doctoral researchers in the USA in 2021

[Statista Research Department](#), 2 June 2023)

- Age -25 and younger -0.8%
- Age- 26 -30 – 44.7%
- Age 31 -35 – 30.9%
- Age 36- 40 -11.6%
- Age 41 – 45 -5.1%
- Age 45+ -6.9%

Slide 11: Q2: What discipline attracts more mature-age students?

Slide 12: 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)

Slide 13: 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

Slide 14: 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.

Slide 15: **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.”

<https://www.aoug.org.uk/aoug-awards/aoug-chancellor-baroness-boothroyd-award-for-citizenship-identities-and-governance-20/>

Slide 16 : **Doing a doctoral research project later in life**

Slide 17: **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.

Slide 18: **OU Theses archive**

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

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

Slide 19: **Examination**

Viva voce - in person, online or hybrid.

Slide 20: **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.

Slide 21: **Q3 Why would you do a doctorate later in life?**

Slide 22: **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)

Slide 23: 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)

Slide 24: 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'.

Slide 25: 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.

Slide 26: Rewards (and challenges)

Slide 27: 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!

Slide 28: **Lesley's previous experience and qualifications**

- Independent consultancy in the UK and South Africa. – Collaborative quality improvement
- Portfolio life inspired by Charles Handy.
- University of Pretoria
- Ethiopian Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP)
- H800 from Johannesburg -Masters in Research Skills PhD
- MSc Business Management Systems
- Consultancy Portfolio Life : Charles Handy
- People Processes Systems

Slide 29: **Personal Challenges**

- Other stuff happening
- Time
- Money
- Family and relationships
- Employment or work pressures
- Mental health and sustaining a tenacious and determined outlook.
- Caring responsibilities

Slide 30: **Academic Challenges**

- Pulling your proposal together
- Identifying your Research Questions
- Constructing and structuring a sustained written argument
- Learning about research philosophies and methodologies, and making choices
- Getting to grips with and using new technologies
- Presenting and defending work against critique
- Trajectory of supervisor relationships and academic valuing of your prior experience

Slide 31: **A life-changing experience**

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Mcleod, 2023)

1. Physiological needs are biological requirements for human survival, e.g., air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, sex, and sleep.
2. Safety needs – people want to experience order, predictability, and control in their lives.
3. Love and belongingness needs refers to a human emotional need for interpersonal relationships, affiliating, connectedness, and being part of a group.
4. Esteem needs are the fourth level in Maslow's hierarchy and include self-worth, accomplishment, and respect.
5. Self-actualization needs are the highest level in Maslow's hierarchy, and refer to the realization of a person's potential, self-fulfilment, seeking personal growth, and peak experiences.

“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)

Slide 32: **Q5 Is it worth it?**

Slide 33: **Q5 How does it feel?**

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

[Lesley’s graduation ceremony Milton Keynes Theatre, 15th March 2023, Aged 61](#)

Slide 34: **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](#)

Slide 35: **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?

Slide 36: **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.

Slide 37: References

- AdvanceHE (2023). *Equality in higher education. Students statistical report 2023*. Data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/reports-publications-and-resources/equality-higher-education-statistical-reports>
- Australia Bureau of Statistics (2000). *Participation in Education: Mature age people in education and training*, Australian Social Trends. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/bf1ef9d60e6491c4ca2570ec000e3637!OpenDocument>
- 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>
- Brazziel, W. F. (1992). Older Students and Doctorate Production, *The Review of Higher Education*, Volume 15, Number 4, Summer 1992, pp. 449-462. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.1992.0009>
- Dyvik, Einar H. (2023). *Higher education in Sweden 2021, by age group*, Statista, 10 January. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/532396/sweden-participation-in-higher-education-by-age-group/#:~:text=Close%20yo%201%2C750%20people%20aged,institutions%20in%20Sweden%20in%202021>
- Fung, A., Southcott, J. and L. C. Siu, F. (2017) 'Exploring Mature-Aged Students' Motives for Doctoral Study and their Challenges: A Cross Border Research Collaboration', *International journal of doctoral studies*, 12, pp. 175–195. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.28945/3790>.
- Mcleod, S. (2023) Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs. Available at: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html> (Accessed: 1 December 2023)
- Stapleton, Andy (2023a). Older PhDs student experiences – should you pursue a PhD later in life? *ACADEMIA INSIDER*, 26 April. Available at: <https://academiainsider.com/older-phds-student-experiences-should-you-pursue-a-phd-later-in-life/>
- 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/>
- Statista Research Department (2023). *Number of doctoral students in Russia 2021, by gender and age*, May 10. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1130491/doctoral-students-russian-universities-russia/>
- 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.

Slide 38: ANY QUESTIONS?

For further information go to:-

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/programmes/maintenance-cognitive-stimulation-therapy-mcst/>

[Cognitive stimulation therapy \(CST\) and maintenance cognitive stimulation therapy \(MCST\) | BPS - British Psychological Society](#)

Sections of text taken from a contribution by Prof Aimee Spector, Professor of Old Age Clinical Psychology, University College London in A guide to psychosocial interventions in early stages of dementia (second edition)

Slide 39:

- Recommendation: Make time for cognitively stimulating activities that you've always enjoyed.
 - Rationale: Continuing favourite activities can ensure sustainability of cognitive stimulation. Long-term exposure to cognitive stimulation may be needed for practical functional benefits.
- Recommendation: Add some new cognitive challenges, as your time and enjoyment permit.
 - Rationale: Trying new activities may enhance brain plasticity by requiring new learning or development of new cognitive strategies (music lessons, learning a new language, aqua)
- Recommendation: Aim to engage in cognitively stimulating activities several times a week or more... generate some "mental sweat"
 - Rationale: 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.
- Recommendation: Be aware that there is no one cognitive activity, or combination of activities, that is uniquely good for reducing AD risk.
 - Rationale: 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.
- Recommendation: Social interactions are a great way to stimulate the mind.

Rationale: 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.

Thank you for joining today & questions.

Summary of related resources to The Ageing Well Public Talk Series Negative emotions

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](#)

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](#)

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

[Ageing Well Public Talks' Series 2023/2024](#) repository on ORDO Collections

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

['Ageing Well Public Talks' Series 2021/2022](#) repository on ORDO Collections

['Ageing Well Public Talks' Series 2020/2021](#) repository on ORDO Collections

['Ageing Well Public Talks' Series 2019/2020](#) repository on ORDO Collections

[Midlife MOT OpenLearn Course](#)

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

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