

Paul Harris talks about how he studied by distance learning before going to university

I didn't follow the normal route to university. Most of my teenage friends stayed on at school, passed their exams, chose their favourite university and continued their education. I couldn't wait to get to work and left without any qualifications, feeling that having a salary was more important. I spent a few years doing different jobs but always wondered what might have happened if I had followed my friends' example.

It was ten years later, in my late twenties, and after I discovered a love of history, that I finally decided I wanted to go to university. I thought about giving up my job and spending a year at college getting the exams I needed for university, but I couldn't afford to do this. So I decided to study on a distance-learning course and keep my job. This was long before the internet and online learning. My course consisted of a parcel brought by the postman with all the books I needed for the year, a study plan and the contact details of my tutors. No telephone number, just an address of a business where I had to post my work.

I would spend a week or two studying the next unit, write an essay and post it to the tutor. I would then wait, usually for at least two weeks, for the tutor's reply. It was always a very exciting moment when the postman arrived and I opened the envelope to see how well I had done. My tutor's comments were always very helpful, though I often wished I could phone him for the chance to discuss some of the things he had written.

I passed the exams and did indeed go to university. And the distance-learning course taught me the importance of hard work and the need to focus. It wasn't easy studying like this without the technology available today. I wasn't able to ask the questions I had

and get the quick response that communication tools now make possible. But I also think it was much easier to concentrate then. There was no mobile phone to turn to every five minutes or social media to follow. I'm glad I did it my way.

- 1 How did Paul feel about going to university when he left school?
 - A He wanted to be like his friends.
 - B He didn't think he could get the qualifications he needed.
 - C He wanted to earn money.
 - D He regretted not going.
- 2 Paul chose a distance-learning course
 - A because he loved his job.
 - B so he could continue working.
 - C because he couldn't find a history course at college.
 - D because it was too late to go to college.
- 3 What does Paul say about the course?
 - A He would have liked more contact with his tutor.
 - B He didn't understand his tutor's comments.
 - C His tutor's handwriting was difficult to read.
 - D The post service was very poor.
- 4 Paul thinks that
 - A he would have done even better if the internet had existed.
 - B it was difficult to focus during his studies.
 - C online learning is more effective.
 - D the internet can make studying difficult.
- 5 What would be a good introduction to this article?
 - A Paul Harris warns against choosing distance learning after his negative experiences.
 - B Forget college: distance learning is the best way to get that university place, says Paul Harris.
 - C Paul Harris describes his experiences of studying at a distance without the use of modern technology.
 - D Distance learning should be avoided if you are not serious about your goal, writes Paul Harris.