

Time to Think

Open University Journeys in British and Irish prisons during the years of conflict, 1972-2000

Oral History interview clip transcript

Name of Interviewee: **Jim McVeigh**
Interviewed by: **Jenny Meegan**
Date of interview: **29/03/2011**

Important

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it.

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Clip title: It may as well have been written in hieroglyphics

Duration: 00:02:04

Clip start point in full interview: 00:02:15

Clip end point in full interview: 00:04:47

Interview identifier: 016_S_01

Description: Jim McVeigh recounts how he went into the Republican Wings of the H Blocks (the Maze and Long Kesh Prison) with a negative experience of education, having left school at 15 with no qualifications. After encouragement from one of the leaders of republican prisoners he did O levels before starting The Open University in the 1980s. Then the Introductory Social Sciences (D102) course book which the republican leader had previously given him to read and which had seemed far too difficult then gradually became less intimidating and more manageable.

Transcript:

The first year with The Open University? Well actually, my first recollection of The Open University was that Michael Culbert; who is my director in Coiste, my boss, who was one of the older more experienced prisoners at the time when I went in. When I first went into the H Blocks, and I can't remember what block it was, but I remember meeting Michael Culbert a number of times. He was one of the leaders of the prisoners, the Republican prisoners in that particular block I was in. And I always remember him giving me a number of books to read and one of them was the Introduction to the old D102 - the 'Introduction to the Social Sciences' with The Open University. And I actually remember flicking through it, and at the time it was almost as if it was written in Chinese. I mean, I had left school at fifteen with a very sort of negative experience of academic education and while I was interested politically, this was really the first experience of education that I'd had since I left school. And when I had flicked through the book that Michael had given me it seemed, I couldn't understand it, it seemed very weighty, very complex and then over the course of the next year or two I had been encouraged. I did an O level [Ordinary level exams] in Social Sciences, in Sociology and did an English O level and we were involved in reading, debating and discussing, and I remember then enrolling in The Open University. And by that time, I remember getting the first package of material from The Open University. I remember reflecting back upon say it was something like two years previously when Michael had given me the book and as I say, it may as well have been written in Chinese or hieroglyphics, but as I say by the time I had enrolled, my whole attitude and my ability if you like had changed by that time.