

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:	Tom Roberts
Interviewed by:	Jenny Meegan
Date of interview :	23/06/2011

Important

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Clip title: Discrimination against ex-prisoners despite educational achievements

Duration: 00:01:21

Clip start point in full interview: 00:18:40

Clip end point in full interview: 00:20:01

Interview identifier: 044_S_01

Description:

Tom Roberts studied with The Open University in the Loyalist wings of the H Blocks (the Maze and Long Kesh Prison) and in Maghaberry Prison in the late 1980s and graduated with a first class Honours degree in Mathematics in 1993. In this clip Tom reflects on the sense of self-esteem from his educational achievements and the intrinsic value of education as well as criticisms from other prisoners who questioned the value of education outside prison and discrimination of ex-prisoners in employment.

Transcript:

Was it any use to you when you got out? What happened to you and your passion for Maths when you got out?

I have mixed feelings around it. It did a lot for my own self-esteem, having a first class Honours degree, because it gave you, as I say, a sense of esteem but the other— it was a disappointment in the fact that because of, the discrimination that is practiced against ex-prisoners, I was never able to put the knowledge that I had gained into practice because I was never going to get a job that was in keeping with the educational ability that I had. So that was a source of disappointment for me. And also it diminished my argument to the people, the naysayers, who said, “What are you doing education for? It will never do you any good” To an extent, they were right if you are looking at purely in how it would benefit you financially or otherwise, but I would argue still that it benefitted me for my self-esteem and my own understanding of life. I think people who go through life without having a quest for education, their life wouldn’t be as fulfilling if they don’t understand what is going on around them.