

## 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: **Gordon Macintyre**

Interviewed by: **Written submission by participant**

Date of interview: **23/07/2013**

#### **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:** A request for help

**Duration:** Written submission by participant

**Clip start point in full interview:** Written submission by participant

**Clip end point in full interview:** Written submission by participant

**Interview identifier:** 059\_T\_01

**Description:** Gordon Macintyre, the first Regional Director of The Open University in Northern Ireland, explains an approach from the Northern Ireland Office to The Open University for help with education provision. He describes how this led to his meeting in Long Kesh (the Compounds of the Maze and Long Kesh Prison) in 1973 with the Commanding Officers of the Provisional IRA, the Official IRA, the UVF and UDA who all testified to the need for education within their ranks.

**Transcript:**

Not long after I became Regional Director of The Open University in Northern Ireland in July 1972, we were approached by the Prison Education and Training Service of the Northern Ireland Office. They were confronted by a substantial increase in the prison population, and it had become apparent that there was both need and demand for educational provision. They wished to know whether we could help. In the early summer of 1973, arrangements were made for me to visit Long Kesh [the Compounds of the Maze and Long Kesh Prison], as it was then called. I'm not sure what form I expected the meeting to take, but what happened in those days of Special Category status, was that after being cleared for admission through security, I was conducted by a Prison Officer to a small hut containing some chairs and was left there. In the course of the next few minutes, there arrived in succession Billy McKee; a veteran Republican, who was then Officer Commanding the Provisional IRA in the prison; Gusty Spence, Officer Commanding the UVF, and the Officers Commanding the Official IRA and the UDA- each of whom introduced himself to me. No Prison Officer was present.

The four men clearly knew each other, and treated each other, and me, with great courtesy and respect. All the men testified to the need for educational facilities within their ranks, and it seemed in keeping with this rather extraordinary occasion that I undertook to represent them all in passing on their pleas to the Northern Ireland Office. It soon became apparent that what many of those in the prison required was more in the nature of basic education in literacy, and this was for the NIO to arrange. But the OU was encouraged to advise and register those for whom higher education was appropriate, and at one time there were as many as one hundred students following our courses and being visited by tutors.