

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: **Heather Laird**
Interviewed by: **Pat Jess**
Date of interview: **15/08/2011**

Important

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Clip title: Memories of teaching in the H Blocks

Duration: 00:02:19

Clip start point in full interview: 00:03:24

Clip end point in full interview: 00:06:00

Interview identifier: 060_T_01

Description: Heather Laird worked as an Open University Tutor Counsellor and tutored Technology modules between 1987- 1998. In this clip Heather recalls her own practical experiences of delivering tutorials in the H Blocks, and the difficulties of navigating herself around the H Blocks, often unaccompanied, in order to take the next tutorial.

Transcript:

The Maze was a particularly interesting set up in that you tutored the students actually in the H Blocks [the Maze and Long Kesh Prison], normally in a classroom at the end of the Block, very often with other classes going on at the same time in the same room, so you could have had somebody teaching French in one corner and somebody else doing a Technology tutorial in another corner, and somebody in another corner doing something else, so it was quite a busy environment and required quite a level of concentration, I think on the part of the student and on the part of the tutor. You may well have had two students in the same block but on different Wings [section of prison] and it was separate classes, it wasn't one class for both, it was ne'er the twain shall meet on some occasions.

What are your recollections about actually accessing once you turned off the road and accessing the prison, how did you find that worked for you?

On a dry day it wasn't too bad, on a wet day it wasn't so good. Generally speaking it wasn't too bad because your first port of call was always the education department to let them know that you were there. In the early stages I would have been escorted to wherever I was going. Gradually as I went in more frequently they decided that I could be trusted to wander round the place on my own and gave me an unescorted pass and that was fine but it was a bit geographically challenging on occasions, knowing, because there was no logical order, you know two [H Block 2] didn't necessarily come beside one [H Block 1] or just after one, there was an interesting layout of the way the Blocks were if I remember correctly. So you know, it was easy to go astray and get a little lost or you could get picked up in a mini bus but normally it was on foot. The education staff were very helpful, very supportive and there was always the opportunity if you had ten minutes in between arriving and the schedule of the visit, you got a seat, you got a cup of coffee, opportunity to visit bathrooms whatever, before being dispatched off to the H Blocks which weren't the most decoratively beautiful of classrooms, I have to say.