

## 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: **Mike Tomlinson**  
Interviewed by: **Pat Jess**  
Date of interview: **20/02/2014**

#### **Important**

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**Clip title:** We were talking about a very special context

**Duration:** 00:02:04

**Clip start point in full interview:** 00:28:17

**Clip end point in full interview:** 00:30:21

**Interview identifier:** 074\_T\_01

**Description:** Mike Tomlinson tutored Criminology courses with The Open University between 1986 and 1992 and tutored students in the H Blocks of the Maze and Long Kesh Prison and in four other prisons across Ireland. In this clip he recalls how The Open University course team for Crime, Justice and Society (D310), asked him, because of his local subject expertise, to prepare a reading list and guide to the Criminal Justice process in Northern Ireland. He reflects on his engagement and intellectual debates with prison students and the challenges of teaching that subject material in the prisons.

**Transcript:**

One of the difficulties with the course [Crime, Justice and Society] was we were talking about a very special context [Northern Ireland], a very unusual context, and there wasn't a lot of material that addressed that. Although at one stage I was invited by the course team to prepare an annotated bibliography to fulfil that demand, so that there was some sort of reading list and a six page guide or whatever as to how you might access Social Science commentary on the Criminal Justice process in Northern Ireland. So that was a gain, that was a plus, that was an engagement that came out of the need, the rather special circumstances, that was always actually one of the interesting intellectual debates with the prisoners which still goes on I think. There is a view that the circumstances of the Northern Ireland prisons, the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice process, the Northern Ireland political situation was wholly unique and there was no other circumstances that were parallel. And I think intellectually what you were trying to do was to get people to think about process structure, agency, data, to try to get people to get outside of the peculiarities of context and to generalize across systems, across circumstances and to be able to distinguish between what was strange and unusual but also what was common.