

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:	Student J
Interviewed by:	Philip O'Sullivan
Date of interview:	12/01/2018

Important

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Clip title: The only place in Southern Ireland that you could do an Open University course was in prison.

Duration: 00:01:31

Clip start point in full interview: 00:20:07

Clip end point in full interview: 00:21:54

Interview identifier: 105_S_01

Description: Student J was imprisoned in Portlaoise Prison in County Laois in the 1980s. He was among eight Republican prisoners there who started studying with The Open University in 1985. He reflects on the introduction of Open University courses in the prisons in the Republic of Ireland that year and how the OU was not available to people not in prison until much later.

Transcript:

By that stage, the Prison Governor had changed. I'm not saying that he made the place easier, but the previous Governors would just say "no" and not explain why-. He'd explain why, and that made a huge difference. So we built up a relationship—

Did he help facilitate the OU then, or was that Kevin [Kevin Warner]? How did that come about?

Well, he was the Governor but Kevin would have been the education [Education Coordinator] for the whole Prison Service; not just for Portlaoise. But anyway, if you like, the timeline was I think '85, '84, the second level teachers came in and then '85 was the first time that we got the OU. And that was really interesting, because the only place in Southern Ireland that you could do an Open University course was in prison. Because it was the British thing, and it wasn't allowed, I know they've opened it up to Ireland now -obviously we're in the offices [Open University Office in Dublin] - but at that stage, it wasn't available and that was just an anomaly. We could do it in prison, but people outside couldn't which is an interesting one. And the first year that we did it, we were only offered one course. At the time - and I don't know what the structure is now - you had to do two foundation programmes; and each programme was kind of a full credit and some modules were half the size of other ones and you had to build up six credits. That's the way it was at the time. And the one that we did was the Social Sciences foundation, and I think seven or eight of us did that.