

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: **Claire O’Kane**
Interviewed by: **Jenny Meegan**
Date of interview: **05/08/2015**

Important

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Clip title: The Early Days of Organizing Tuition in the Prison
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Description: Claire O’Kane from The Open University’s Belfast office was closely involved in the administrative and clerical support of the teaching in the prisons from the early 1970s onwards. Here she talks about the role of Diana Purcell and Jane Nelson and other the key individuals from the University and in the prison, who arranged tutorial timetables and tutorial visits and the difficulties of this during the Troubles.

Transcript:

So back about '75-76 when you also worked for Diana Purcell, this was only four years into, three years into the prison scheme?

Three, I think.

So it was really, was it Diana who was involved in organising the tuition for prisoners at that time? There was Diana, was anybody else involved?

Well I think at the start, I don’t know, but I think Jane Nelson and Bill Lindsay started it off. I am not sure how Diana became involved, but I worked closely then with Diana on the prisons, and Jane would have had a lot of involvement as well with the Science students. And the fact that Science kits were not allowed in the prison- she had to sort of compromise with other stuff- so I would have worked more closely with Diana than anybody else

Can you tell me a bit about what your work with Diana in organising tuition with the prison students involved? It was all office based?

It was all office based, I was never in the prison. Diana was up and down to the prison a lot, but I would have been involved with the Prison Education officers; Harry Hughes and Dominic Henry. Any problems, they would have phoned the office or if a prisoner wasn’t able to see an AL [Open University Associate Lecturer], we’d have to contact them. There was a lot more paperwork and telephone work with the prisons then, and Diana would have been bringing materials up and down to the prison and I would have had to get that ready for her. Timetables would have had to be done and at the time, it was when the Troubles were quite bad, and sometimes the ALs were not able to go to the prison so we had to ring or else we would get a phone call from the prison to say that the student couldn’t be seen today.