

## 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: **Philip O'Sullivan**  
Interviewed by: **Jenny Meegan**  
Date of interview: **19/01/2019**

#### **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.

In some cases, interviewees may have made changes to the transcript.

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<b>Clip title:</b>	We learned as we went along
<b>Duration:</b>	00:02:31
<b>Clip start point in full interview:</b>	00:06:24
<b>Clip end point in full interview:</b>	00:08:55
<b>Interview identifier:</b>	077_T_01

**Description:** Philip O'Sullivan is a Staff Tutor and Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences with The Open University based in the Belfast office. He has been co-leader of the Ireland Oral History Project since 2010, this later became known as the 'Time to think' Project and has been an interviewer for the Project. In this clip Philip is responding to a question about how the Project developed from the start and whether it worked to a plan.

**Transcript:**

*Working together over the last eight, nine years, would you say that the project worked to plan?*

There's a short answer to that, Jenny, which is "No". There was no plan. I think the origins of it have probably been documented elsewhere but it started by serendipity. A phone call to the office, a development board looking to develop former Long Kesh, Maze site, somebody who really didn't know much about it making a vague reference to, "I think the OU might've been involved somehow with the other universities". Which was a bit of a travesty given the role of The Open University in the prison. And there was going to be a peace, an education, a Peace and Reconciliation Centre there - it never happened, but that's how the OU got involved, yourself and other colleagues here in the Belfast office. And I think, it dawned on you perhaps, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but we had a unique story that needed to be told or to be captured. And what started with, "Let's interview one or two people, let's find a student or tutor to see what they can remember about teaching in the Maze, Long Kesh whenever". One or two interviewees morphed into three or four, into five or six, and of course there's a variety of different political organisations and prisoner groupings so we had to get a wider range, get a balance and then ten or twelve interviews developed into fifteen, into twenty, into twenty five and then of course there were other voices, not just the prisoners and the tutors, but the prison officers, the education staff, all the administrators and the people who worked in The Open University who supported it through their professional services, played an equally important part. So it started not by accident, but then it grew organically, went sideways and backwards and upwards and downwards, in every direction, and it mushroomed, snowballed, stalled. So this is not an archetypal academic project, where we set out at the start with a set of aims and missions and the methodology and a process and it's all neatly compartmentalized, as you might do now if you were supervising a Masters [Postgraduate Degree], or a research [degree], or a PhD [Doctor of Philosophy], this thing just happened by accident, chance and it developed. And I think in true educational style, we learned as we went along by what we did wrong, and the things we didn't do.