

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: **Shelagh Livingstone**
Interviewed by: **Jenny Meegan**
Date of interview: **21/09/2013**

Important

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Shelagh Livingstone Clip

Clip title: Men studying on the inside while women studied on the outside

Duration: 00:02:08

Clip start point in full interview: 00:04:59

Clip end point in full interview: 00:07:06

Interview identifier: 101_O_01

Description: Shelagh Livingstone was a member of the Board of Visitors in the Maze and Long Kesh Prison from 1979 until the 1990s visiting mostly in the H blocks. She studied a course in Adult Learning and Adult Education in 1990 and tutored Open University Community Education courses with a women's group in West Belfast. Here Shelagh recalls visiting a prison student who was doing a similar OU course as herself and how they gave each other peer support as students. Shelagh also reflects on the importance of women on the outside, from the same communities as many of the prisoners inside, reengaging with education themselves.

Transcript:

And then the opportunity came, many years later, and it was during the years that I was visiting [member of the Board of Visitors] in Maze [H Blocks the Maze and Long Kesh Prison], to do a post-graduate course in Adult Learning and Adult Education [E355]. So I did The Open University course at that time and also at that time interestingly enough, I had been teaching some of the Open University community education courses with a group of women in West Belfast and when I say "teaching", that is the wrong word but I had been there with them as they learned, so I drew on that for the work I did on my own course.

Was there any connection between you as an OU student and you going into the H Blocks, did you make any connections?

Oh, absolutely, yes, we talked about it. Quite a number of the men were doing OU courses so that was a point of contact with them and one in particular was doing a similar course to mine at the same time and we in fact talked quite a bit about it and read each other's papers and so on and that was encouraging to me and I think perhaps encouraging to him as well.

So he would have read all about the women in West Belfast then?

That's right, yes. Which was in itself exciting because these were women who had no education qualifications, who had come back to education, most of them in their early twenties, although some of them were older than that and many of whom had come into education at that point thinking they were stupid and thinking they couldn't learn, so that was an interesting comparison also and an interesting bit of learning for the men to discover that the women and the places they were coming from were actually now becoming interested in learning themselves.