

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: **Kevin Warner**
Interviewed by: **Pat Jess**
Date of interview: **09/08/2011**

Important

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Clip title: I think we can make that happen

Duration: 00:03:47

Clip start point in full interview: 00:17:42

Clip end point in full interview: 00:21:29

Interview identifier: 095_O_01

Description: Kevin Warner, National Co-ordinator of Education in the Prisons in the Republic of Ireland, describes how he met Diana Purcell at a meeting on prison education in The Open University offices in Belfast in 1984, starting a chain of events which led to Open University study being made available in prisons in the Republic of Ireland from 1985, at the time the only place in the entire jurisdiction where it was available.

Transcript:

It was in that context in Portlaoise that people had got A Levels and were getting very good A Levels and were ready to go to university. There was a demand from Portlaoise but there was also a demand likewise from people in Arbour Hill, Mountjoy and Cork, people who had done the leaving certificate and wanted to study third level. So in that period, in the early 80s, I wrote to every university in the country and I asked them was there any possibility that people could study as external students and I got letters back from every registrar or whoever was the relevant person saying we would love to help but no thanks. I wrote to The Open University in Milton Keynes and I also got a polite letter back saying no thanks, we don't provide education outside the United Kingdom. And it was sometime after that, that I was in Belfast, I had all along had contact with colleagues who were providing education in the prison system in Northern Ireland. At one stage, I went to attend a seminar that they had organised on prison education in The Open University offices in Belfast, and there I met Diana Purcell and talking to her, I told her the story I have just told you that I had been declined, refused by The Open University in Milton Keynes and I think basically as I remember it, she said, leave it to me, and whereas I had gone to the front door and got a refusal, I think of it in terms of she going to the back door and picking her people and sometime later she said I think we can make that happen. Bear in mind at the time that The Open University was not generally available in the community here. There were other people doing Open University and they were using addresses of cousins and friends and so on, in the North of Ireland but that wasn't really an option for us. So that is how it happened.