

## Transcript

### **STEPHEN A KLEMENTOWSKI**

You must try and understand that I was at a dead end, you know. I, in terms of prospects and in terms of opportunities, you know, I've completely cut myself off. I had through my actions ensured that, you know, there was nothing going to be there for me on the other side of this sentence. You know, I knew that. But what I didn't know was there would be an opportunity to do something about it.

### **CJ BURGE**

What I loved is that I knew that no matter what happened in the prison, no matter what got taken away from me, no matter if I was moved from prison to prison, stripped of, you know, being able to see my daughter, when I started the OU, that was something that was mine, something that I could take out of the gate with me. It was like an achievement. It was something that I could not only make myself proud, but also my family.

### **DR DAN WEINBREN**

The Open University opened to students in 1971; today there's about 1,500 students in secure environments who are working with the Open University.

### **ALISON WILLIAMS**

We know that many of the offenders, so 60% of the main prison population have been excluded from school; 23% of those short-term custodial offenders have been excluded from school.

### **STEPHEN A KLEMENTOWSKI**

If the OU insisted that I had my GCSEs and my A-levels and all of that stuff, I wouldn't be talking to you here, sitting here talking to you today.

### **ALISON WILLIAMS**

So I think it was in the '70s when the big prison reform came out and said right, the minute somebody puts a toe over a prison door, their punishment is over. That's what their punishment is, entering, is leaving society. The punishment stops there. At that point you try to change that person. You try to change the reasoning that drove them to it.

### **STEPHEN A KLEMENTOWSKI**

I was introduced to the Open University in 2002 whilst serving a 16-year sentence for a drug-related offence. And at the time I had just completed my initial assessments, as it were referred to at the time. I did well. That was a bit of a surprise for me because I'd left school with no formal qualifications, and education wasn't my thing at the time.

### **DR LAURENCE HOPKINS**

Prison is not conducive to studying, no matter what certain newspapers might say about, oh they've got all the time in the world and they should study away. It's hard. They get moved cells. They have to share cells with people they don't know or don't support them. They get moved from one cell to another. There's a lot usually going on outside prison in terms of parole hearings, court hearings, personal lives. They have to work, most people don't realise that they have a work schedule. So it's quite hard. And I think anybody who manages to get a degree in prison has really overcome a lot of barriers.

**DR DAN WEINBREN**

Because I have to deal with the cost, the churn which is the sense of, you're always moving onto another prison, and not always your books follow you. It's the lack of space, the lack of study place, the sense that not all the other prisoners and all the staff are necessarily supportive of your activities as a student, all of those things and on top of that the thing they share with many other students, lack of confidence. So success for students inside and outside the prison isn't just a matter of person redemption, although that's also there, it's a societal game. So what impresses me is anybody at all ever gets a degree also that we all benefit from it.

**DR LAURENCE HOPKINS**

I think most tutors want to measure difference and I think the Open University really does make a difference in people's lives. But it's stating the obvious to say that a prisoner's life is not going well. I think we'd all agree, if you're in prison things are not going too well for you. It's also a grim place. They are grim, I mean I think that's the, and boring, repetitive.

**STEPHEN A KLEMENTOWSKI**

That's what you have to navigate. You know, prisons are not designed specifically for learning, for education because I have a punishment.

**CJ BURGE**

In some prisons the staff are not as supportive. So the education staff tend to be really supportive because they get it. They deal directly with the Open Uni so they're there and they take your assignments and they can help you photocopy them to make sure that they get to where they need to go. But sometimes the prison staff don't understand I guess how crucial education is to preventing reoffending; they see it as like a soft touch. But this is only a small proportion, but I suppose sometimes that can be really difficult if you come up against the establishment and it's not as supportive as you anticipated.

**STEPHEN A KLEMENTOWSKI**

The role of the personal tutor is to provide students with support, on-call support through their module. And I've been very fortunate to have had a tutor throughout for each module I studied with the Open University. So these are people I've found really inspirational. I've also found them morally enlightened because it's a big ask I think for a tutor to work with somebody in prison just to have really regular contacts with them. Sometimes actually visit them and I've had many many face-to-face tutorials with my tutor.

**CJ BURGE**

They knew that I could do it, they knew that I could succeed. So even when there were times when there were prison officers who maybe were, didn't understand how important education was and just wanted me to serve my sentence and work in the gardens or the kitchen and not really taking up time reading, it was just nice to know that there was a supporter there beyond my family.

**RUTH MCFARLANE**

The stories that we get from tutors about the lengths to which students will go to be successful in their studies are just fantastic.

**STEPHEN A KLEMENTOWSKI**

I had never really thought that, you know, education would be my thing, that learning in that sort of way would be my thing.

**CJ BURGE**

I did three year of the modules in prison. So I had three different tutors and all of them were immensely supportive. Even sometimes when we would only meet once in the whole time, but they would always offer that we could have phone calls and they would write such thorough notes. I think when I was at school before and at uni, I never really used to pay attention to the notes that my tutors made, but in prison like this was so vital. Like I'd read it and read it again because, you know, that was your only input. That was your only connection with your

teacher. So again like all these points were so important and they were just incredibly supportive, they weren't judgemental, and that just really helped to like set our relationship on a really good footing.

#### **DR LAURENCE HOPKINS**

When you go in to be a tutor, it's a highlight of their life. So it feels very rewarding. They are treated with respect. I'm not saying that they're not treated with respect, although I suspect although I suspect they're not treated with that much respect actually in their daily prison lives. But suddenly they've got somebody who's taking them seriously, asking their views, listening, having a discussion about interesting things.

#### **RUTH MCFARLANE**

In the early days of course the distance learning model is really suitable for prison education. And so actually there wasn't that much difference between the support available for students in prison compared to the mainstream students, because everybody was receiving a printed pack and it was all very equitable.

#### **STEPHEN A KLEMENTOWSKI**

Because I would challenge as I've said earlier and I would question authorities. And that was actually what I enjoyed doing. And so what I found learning with the Open University through distant learning, which meant that I was responsible for my learning, I think that proved to be the key for me.

#### **RUTH MCFARLANE**

More recently as we've moved towards digital study experience, the gap has widened. And so although students pay exactly the same fees, whether they're in prison or mainstream, that currently one of my big concerns is the disparity in the provision and the support that's available for students in prison. Our students are amazingly resourceful in terms of how they overcome those barriers and some people are very creative in what they do to set up similar sort of situations. And the results and the outcomes for our students are absolutely on par with mainstream students.

#### **DR DAN WEINBREN**

Things are getting better now because university is setting up something called Virtual Compass which is an online but a not online version of the teaching materials. But it's still very difficult to get to some teaching materials in prisons. And there are some modules which are closed to some prisoners. So it's not entirely straightforward.

#### **RUTH MCFARLANE**

Student loans are only available to people who are within six years of their release. So for people on long sentence that can be quite frustrating, because it would be a really good way to be using your time. And prior to 2012 student study in prison was government funded. But once the higher tuition fee rates came in and the student loans then that meant that students in prison had to apply for loans as well. And so that means that we've got this restriction. So people on long sentence now are not able to benefit from that.

#### **CJ BURGE**

Since being released I go into other prisons and with the charity I work in and I'm aware of some prisons where with longer-term sentence prisoners, sometimes they don't even get their materials. So it's sort of been sent by the OU but seems to have gone missing. And again that can be really disheartening if you're studying, because you're trying your best and yet there are obstacles in the way that are not allowing you to progress. So in those times I think you just have to be really resilient and write to your tutors, let the OU know, let the size team know, and they can do what they can to make sure you get those materials.

#### **RUTH MCFARLANE**

We know that when people are released from a long sentence, if they have been engaging in OU study, partly they're much less likely to reoffend, but also their employability and their employment prospects are much higher if they have a degree. So they're more likely to be able to repay their loan anyway. And nearly everybody in prison will be released at some

point and you want people to be able to do something constructive when they're released. So even if they've got 16 years left to serve, I would still argue that's a good investment, because in the long term they're much less likely to reoffend and they're much more likely to be in a good job.

**CJ BURGE**

What you want to be doing is talking about things outside of the prison with your family, things that matter, and the OU allowed you to do that because whether you were reading something or you were watching a DVD or you were reading comments back from your tutor or having a tutorial over the phone, you were able to immerse yourself in something beyond the gates. And it was so empowering and almost became like a sense of freedom when I was studying, which I never imagined that I would feel I just oh god, you know, got to get through this, I've got to get to the end, it's going to be really tough. But actually it was something that helped me get through my sentence.

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