

University of Limerick Oral History Project

Professor Jim Gleeson

Interview 11 January 2017.

**I.: Interview with Professor Jim Gleeson, 11 January 2017. Professor Gleeson, thank you very much for coming in today. Can I invite you to tell me a little bit about yourself?**

JG.: Thank you very much Catherine for the invitation. I was born in Drangan, County Tipperary in 1946, parents Jim and Nora, grew up on a small farm and attended the local Convent of Mercy primary school until the end of third class, then went to Moyglass National school until 1959, then boarded at Patrician College Ballyfin – now a very internationally renowned hotel – until 1964. After that, went to St. Patrick's College Maynooth, where I spent a total of nine years including two years post-graduate study. Following that I was parish chaplain in our Lady of Dolours, Glasnevin, Dublin and full-time chaplain and teacher of Religious Education, English and Irish in Coláiste Eoin, Cappagh Road, Finglas, from 1973 to 1976. I took the Higher Diploma in Education at NUI Maynooth in 1975/6 followed by an M.Ed. This involved full time study in 1976-7 and I completed the thesis 1977-79 after I returned to my own diocese of Cashel and Emly where I was curate in Moyglass and full-time chaplain/teacher of R.E., English and Irish at what's now Scoil Ruáin, formerly Killenaule Vocational School.

After I left the priesthood in 1979 I was invited to work with Eustás Ó hEideáin, Professor of Education at NUI Galway as a research assistant on the external evaluation of the Irish-based European funded transition

from school to work projects. There were three of those projects – Shannon Curriculum Development Centre, City of Dublin VEC/TCD Curriculum Unit and North Mayo, the latter funded by the Irish Foundation for Human Development headed up by Ivor Browne. I was appointed Junior Lecturer in Education in what was then Thomond College of Education in Limerick in 1981 and successfully applied for the position of Lecturer in Education in 1992. As a junior member of the Education Department, which had nine academic staff, my teaching responsibilities were rather generalist in the first couple of years, Professor Diarmuid Leonard was Department Head. Student intake was strictly controlled by the Department of Education and the numbers began to drop during the recession of the 1980s. The Education Department had eight other members when I joined and there was a strong emphasis on the Foundation Discipline of Education. There were some fifty other members of academic staff ranging from English, Irish, Math, Geography – the electives for the Physical Education programme – to General and Rural Science, Wood and Building, Metalwork and Engineering. Most members of these latter Departments had come from a number of small teacher training colleges established to train teachers in particular subject areas (Coláiste Charman, Gorey; Crawford Institute; Ringsend etc). For many of them the whole concept of Education Studies was very new and a little strange. Student entrance numbers were carefully controlled by the Department of Education. Our programmes were diligently validated by the National Council for Educational Awards, whose Director was Pádraig MacDiarmada, and that Council also awarded our degrees..

The evaluator poacher became gamekeeper in 1983 when I was appointed Project Leader of SPIRAL2, the second series of EU funded Transition from School to Work projects, at Shannon Curriculum Development Centre. I was seconded to work on curriculum development for four years and worked with a team of five project officers as well as a large number of associates. During this time we developed Senior Certificate programmes, the precursor of the Leaving Cert Applied as well as a junior cycle Irish language programme, Fáilte Isteach and work on gender equality.

On my return to Thomond College in '87 I established a curriculum development initiative focusing on vocational preparation and training, then a major focus of European and national education and training policy. I went on secondment again in 1989, this time to carry out the external evaluation of European Studies (Ireland and Great Britain), which was set in the context of Anglo-Irish relations and involved the twinning of schools in the three jurisdictions of Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and England. Teachers of History and Geography implemented the curriculum materials developed by the project team and there was a strong emphasis on IT based communications.

**I. That's great, thanks very much. You mentioned the transition in 1991 when you led the Department through that transition to the University of Limerick when Thomond was amalgamated with the University of Limerick.**

JG The National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE) achieved University status in 1989 and Thomond College was integrated with the

University of Limerick in July 1991 when the government introduced the Dissolution of Thomond College Act. At that time I was appointed Head of what had been called the Education Department in Thomond College, re-designated the Department of Second-Level Education at integration... it would subsequently become the Department of Education and Professional Studies (EPS) and is known today as the School of Education.

As noted earlier I had been on secondment for five or six years out of my ten years at TCE. I remember at the time of the transition feeling that this would only be cosmetic, 'all change and no change'. I was totally wrong. It was quite a dramatic change. From my own perspective, I working on the evaluation of European Studies and only marginally involved in the staff discussions at Thomond College, I had no particular objections to the integration, because I saw Thomond as an intimate, inward looking institution that lacked leadership. Research was not encouraged, in fact, one could argue it was discouraged. Dr Tony Watson in PE was the exception to this. He was publishing quite prolifically, but not many other people were, they didn't have the space or motivation, it was very much a teacher training college.

The integration happened at a time when the Registrar, T V Power, was on secondment from Thomond. Hugh O' Donnell, Head of English, was Acting Registrar, and he had a key role in whatever discussions took place, with the Director taking a hands-off approach. The recognized Trade Union – I always remained a member of the Teachers Union of Ireland – was English-based with a stronger focus on admin. rather than academic matters ... the recognized Union currently recognized at UL today is its successor. The Union embargoed all discussions with the

university, while the clock was quickly running down in Leinster House. Effectively then, Thomond was a lamb to the slaughter with no prior agreements, conditions or negotiations in place. Once the Act was passed in the Dáil, Thomond ceased to exist, and the ball was completely in the court of the University.

Immediately after integration it was it pretty clear that the University wanted to change the guard. I always had wonderful respect for Diarmuid Leonard, and, when I was appointed HoD I had strong reservations about appearing to usurp him. When I was offered the position however I accepted it in the knowledge that there was another colleague who was more than happy to replace him if I didn't.

It was a lovely summer in 1991. I remember being away at a meeting at Shannon Curriculum Development Centre and getting an urgent call to come in to meet Ed Walsh, who asked me to become Head of Department. I remember feeling quite embarrassed because Ed was quite formal always and I knew I wasn't dressed as formally as he would like me to be but I also knew that when Ed asked to see you, you should show up as promptly as possible. Another standout memory is being taken on a long walk by Cliona Donnellan from Buildings and Estates across from what's now the Schrodinger building to the Schuman building which was just being completed. I wasn't even aware of its existence and I remember discovering this spanking new building and being told that this is where the Department would be located.

It was agreed at the special Academic Council meeting of July 16, 1991, that all student teachers would belong either to the Department of Second Level Education or Physical Education (PE), the two Departments

making up the Faculty of Education. Meanwhile some 80% of my Thomond teacher educator colleagues were deployed to other Departments and faculties within the university with ‘turf wars’ being a big feature of this transition period as we tried to protect the interests of teacher education in this new environment.

### **I. You mentioned relationships with Mary Immaculate College?**

Prior to 1991 there had been very little dialogue between the two institutions ... they existed very independently. Initially there was some natural hope about what might happen in 1991. Now what’s important historically here is that the closure of Carysfort in the mid-eighties was still very live in people’s minds. That had been influenced by a prevailing environment influenced by the economic downturn of the late ‘80s and the famous Charles Haughey speech about tightening our belts and the need to cut back on public spending ...

There was a strong move around that time towards the rationalisation of teacher education into probably two Centres with one in Dublin with a strong sense that Limerick would be the other one, because it had primary and secondary teacher education. And with Thomond joining the university and Mary Immaculate having an academic relationship with UL, a lot of other colleges were extremely concerned about their futures at that time. While that was fashionable during the ministry of Mary O’Rourke, things moved into this period of political uncertainty. After the next election Paddy Cooney became Minister for Education and after that we had the Fianna Fáil /Labour government with Niamh Breathnach as Minister for Education and the rationalization of teacher education was replaced by broader issues including the publication of the Green and White Papers. So none of those fears really came to anything. It is also

interesting that Ed Walsh in his book talks about an approach from John Moroney in February 1990 on behalf of senior Thomond management that indicated a willingness on their part to discuss a new relationship with UL (which had achieved university status the previous year) and that Ed was told by the Secretary to the Department of Education later that year the decision to amalgamate the two colleges had already been taken.

It is interesting in passing, that the much more recent review done by Pasi Sahlberg, John Furlong and Pamela Munn was again expressing concerns about the plurality of teacher education institutions and the lack of critical mass in teacher education, and they proposed the establishment of six institutes as against the twenty something teacher ed. colleges we continue to have in place; but that is a separate issue. But I think it is salient that Limerick for a while looked like being a key player nationally in teacher education, and the Sahlberg, Furlong and Munn report published in 2012 again identified the potential of Limerick to be a national centre. This was to become a reality when the National Institute for Studies in Education (NISE) was established in 2018 or so as a joint UL/MIC venture...

Going back to 1991, following inter-institutional discussions, the Department of Primary Education at Mary Immaculate College was added to the mix under the formula of 'academic cooperation and institutional autonomy'. In practice MIC remained rather aloof. While distance was an obvious difficulty it was also clear that this Catholic Sisters of Mercy College of Education, established in 1898, valued its independence. The Irish Federation of University Teachers was well established there while UL had an English-based Union. From the UL side it was felt that generic courses in education, like in the disciplines of

philosophy, psychology, sociology, curriculum could have been taught in common to primary and secondary. Their Arts and Humanities school had a similar relationship with the UL Faculty of Humanities.

Professor Noel Mulcahy, formerly Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Science and Dean of Research, was our Acting Dean. I found Noel quite understanding and supportive. Hugh O' Donnell from the Thomond side was Associate Dean and we had all the normal structures. The Assistant Dean Academic Affairs (ADAA) was Dr John O'Brien, a former Department of Education Inspector, who had been a lecturer in Physics in Thomond College. Dr. Tony Watson from Physical Education, a prolific researcher and writer who has since passed away, a native of East Anglia, was Assistant Dean Research. The late Kaye Green was Assistant to the Dean.

The Faculty of Education, immediately after integration, had two departments only: second-level education, which I've been talking about and Physical Education and Sports Science, or PESS, and the late Liam Dugdale and I worked together very closely at that time. Liam died tragically of natural causes as a younger man circa 1999. Following discussions between the two institutions the primary education department at Mary Immaculate College became (notionally at least), part of the College of Education because their academic accreditation was coming from the University. Their representatives attended Faculty Board meetings at Plassey and various attempts were made to develop the relationship further. Indeed, Minister O'Rourke had proposed that Limerick would become the primary provider of teacher education in the country with its traditions of primary and secondary teacher education.

## **I. You were involved in the appointment of Professor of Education?**

Driven by Noel Mulcahy and supported by Ed Walsh, the University with great alacrity advertised internationally in September 1991 for a Chair of Education. As Head of Department I was involved in the short listing and interview process. There were some thirty applicants and eight or nine individuals were called to interview. The large interview panel was chaired by David Fenton who was a member of the Governing Body as it was called then, and Director of Athlone IT. The external expert on the panel was Professor Malcolm Skillbeck, an Australian who was head of the OECD Education Directorate in Paris. There were two Limerick-based candidates one from Mary Immaculate and one from Second-level Education.

Interviewees included some very well-known Irish education academics - Dr Áine Hyland who subsequently became Professor of Education at UCC; Dr Kathleen Lynch who subsequently became Professor of Education and Head of the Education Equality programme at UCD; Dr. Seamus Ó Buachalla, senior lecturer at Trinity College and two or three American candidates, including Jim McKernan who had been at UCD as a senior lecturer before being appointed to a Distinguished Chair at the University of North Carolina. His expertise was in curriculum studies. Jim was ranked first followed by Áine Hyland and Kathleen Lynch. This recommendation was subject to Ed Walsh's signing off and, as I understand it, he met with the first three and accepted the Board's recommendation. Those interviews were held in December 1991, but Jim had a commitment to stay with Carolina for 1992, so he didn't take up the position until January 1993.

I would have known Jim McKernan reasonably well during his time at Limerick. He found the university frustrating, because, at that time the Deans, along with the President and the Registrar formed the Executive Board and they held long weekly meetings where they dealt with all sorts of detail. For example, the Concert Hall was coming to completion at the time, and I remember Jim telling me that one meeting was spent discussing Kris Kristofferson contract for his upcoming performance in the newly opened concert hall. As an academic Jim found this extremely frustrating, he had no time for writing or research. Furthermore, his liberal thinking and his support for the underdog would not have won him many friends. Jim's own Master's study was on Traveller education in the west of Ireland and he would have been very much an advocate of equality causes. So, Jim's ideological positions didn't always fit the more business-oriented ideology of the university administration at the time.

Jim, an American citizen who had been drafted to fight in Vietnam, had family in the United States and wanted to be there for Christmas '93 at the end of his first year here as Professor. The only flights he could get were earlier than he would have wished. UL was still in trimester mode and Jim missed the winter conferring at the end of the first trimester. That did not go down at all well in the White House ... Furthermore, he wasn't getting back until the 7 or 8 January. Jim was coming to the end of his probationary year at UL and it was decided in his absence not to reappoint him at a time when he was still in the US. In efforts to establish what was actually happening he called me at home from the US on a number of occasions around this time and his perception of what was happening was at variance with Ed Walsh's recollection in his autobiography where he expresses surprise at receiving a call from East

Carolina University to the effect that Jim had resigned from UL to resume his duties in Carolina.

### **I. So you needed a new Dean?**

We did indeed and without any advertising or interview process Ed Walsh promptly invited Dr Kieran Byrne, Head of Education at Mary Immaculate College, to fill the role without its being advertised. Ed would subsequently reveal in his book that he had identified Kieran as a prospective Dean some time previously. Kieran's title was immediately elevated to that of Professor and he occupied the Deanship until he became the Vice President Academic Affairs around 1997. As far as I know Kieran was the first VPA... prior to that these functions were fulfilled by the Registrar. Dr John O'Brien, originally a Lecturer in Physics at Thomond, then became Acting Dean of Education and Tom Geary, a recent appointee, was given the HoD role without any competition.

As Head of Department it was important that I should have a good working relationship with the Dean. As time passed however, I and many of my colleagues, found Kieran's style to be autocratic, condescending and highly political. He depended greatly on the ADAA and on his Assistant John Moroney. Now John had been retained by Thomond College during the eighties on foot of his experience as a farmers' lobbyist in Europe at a time when Thomond was seeking alternatives to teacher education in the interests of viability. Although he did not meet the job criteria for the position, the Dean appointed him as Assistant to the Dean. Ed Walsh describes John in his autobiography as a "fixer" in the best sense of the word.

During this regime I found Education Faculty Board meetings to be largely unproductive. Indeed, I would have seen them as an affront to faculty members who were working really hard to cope with issues associated with integration at a time when resources were sadly lacking, and student numbers were growing. There was no sense of collaboration whatsoever and I would describe the environment within the Faculty as toxic and distasteful. The Dean bypassed members of the SLE Department whenever he could, choosing to ignore the considerable experience of people like Diarmuid Leonard. For example, when the national ministry drew down significant European Structural funds for the purpose of teacher professional development, the Dean set up an In-Career Development Institute without any reference to those of us with considerable experience in that field. This Institute, staffed by people with no relevant knowledge or experience, was essentially a mechanism for drawing down European money for Education and Training after Taoiseach Albert Reynolds achieved a good outcome at the Edinburgh EU Leaders' conference. The Dean's arrogance was epitomized by his grandiose plans that the Institute would produce a refereed international journal. Not surprisingly these plans would disappear in flames. The Institute put a Diploma in ICT in place for teachers which was provided at Education Centres around the country. Participants were reported to be very unhappy with the running of this programme.

As my own professional relationship with the Dean continued to deteriorate, he indicated that he would not be reappointing me as Head of Department when my contract came up for review in 1995. This was a happy release. Indeed, one of my great regrets in life is that I ever accepted the offer to become Head of Department in 1991. I had a young son at the time and family commitments suffered while my PhD was put

on hold in the interests of university business. These were four years that I never got back. Although an interesting learning experience, it was much more of a hindrance than a help from a career perspective. The Dean, Academic Affairs, Dr John O'Brien, became the next Head of Department.

During my time as HoD I would have carried a full load of lectures. But that wasn't all! The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) invited me to work as Project Officer on the development of the Leaving Certificate Applied in 1993. This meant that I was seconded to the NCCA for two days a week up until the LCA was introduced into schools in September 1995. In practice I was doing two jobs. The NCCA reimbursed the university for my two days and that income was lodged into the Office of the Dean account. However, this experience, which arose out of my experience as Project Leader of SPIRAL2 and the development of Senior Certificate programmes, was most fulfilling .... in sharp contrast to my increasingly fraught UL experiences.

**I. So from the wider perspective within the wider university what were the early years of integration like?**

It naturally took some time to adjust to our new environment which was characterized both by challenges and positive aspects. The most positive features included the focus on research and the opportunities to engage professionally with academics from other faculties.

There was a strong sense also that former Thomond staff who were now in other Departments were the workhorses of those departments where they were given heavy teaching loads so as to give university staff more

time to do more research. So those were some of the tensions and the difficulties.

The Education Department lost administrative control of Teaching Practice (TP) which was now under the Co-Operative Education Division. Since teacher education had to conform to the university timetabling system student teachers would no longer have TP each year – instead they had five weeks in Year 2 and ten weeks in Year 4.

The teacher education programmes would continue to depend greatly on former Thomond staff, most of whom had now been allocated to other Departments and Faculties. This issue raised its head as early as September 1991 in relation to the staffing of our successful micro teaching programme developed by Dearbhal Ni Chárthaigh and provided in the excellent facilities at the top level of the Schrodinger building which now belonged to the College of Engineering. Immediately after integration, timetabling information had to be submitted hurriedly in the summer of 1991. When I allocated micro teaching hours to former Thomond people who had been part of the team at Thomond, their new Department Heads were least happy that we were drawing on their staff.

On the other hand, many former colleagues who now belonged to other Faculties were happy to remain involved with Teaching Practice supervision – and this was important. Indeed, when I sought to limit eligibility for Teaching Practice supervision to people who either taught subject pedagogics or had some experience of teaching at second level, some former colleagues who did not meet these criteria objected strenuously when they were not allocated students.

**I.: So how did you and your colleagues feel immediately after integration?**

Former Thomond colleagues saw the integration as an exercise in ‘asset stripping’. The College Farm was one such example. So was the horticulture unit. The farm was on land belonging to Shannon Development, on the left hand side out the Dublin road, between Chawkes and the roundabout that goes down to Vistacon. There's a passageway down to where the farm was. There were two full time staff up there. and, in my recollection again, they had a small herd of cows and some cattle up there. There was a small milking parlour there and other outbuildings. They also produced some cereals and vegetables. Joe Daly was the farm manager. My impression is that the activities on the farm were not really integrated into the B.Sc. (General and Rural Science) programme very much – it would have taken about 25 minutes to get there from the campus. The educational potential of the farm was not maximized and in that sense it was low hanging fruit and it was hard for anybody to make a great case for its retention by the university.

I would imagine that the farm was around thirty-five acres in size. The crops were to the left-hand side of the avenue as you went down in from the Dublin road. It was quite good land, well-drained. It reverted to Shannon Development (SFADCO) and this brings up the issue of the relationship between SFADCO and the university in terms of land ownership in the area. The Schuman is built on SFADCO land.

After integration a horticulture unit was established on the campus for a while, managed by the people from the farm. Horticulture studies would originally have happened on the farm. This unit was located where the

staff car park nearest to the Salesian Church is now. Like the farm, this unit was a laboratory and clearly of relevance to future teachers of Agricultural Science.

### **I.: So why did Thomond College have a farm ?**

The origins of the farm and the horticulture unit lay in the fact that Thomond had a very strong relationship with the Vocational Education Committee schools where vocational subjects such as Building Construction, Woodwork, Engineering, Metalwork and General and Rural science including Agricultural Science were taught. While secondary schools offered the three year 'academic' Intermediate Certificate, vocational schools also offered the more applied Day Vocational Group Certificate, generally known as the Group Certificate.

Thomond College represented the Department of Education's attempt to consolidate the teacher training colleges for various discrete vocational subject areas e.g. Woodwork in Choláiste Charmain, Gorey, General and Rural Science at Crawford Institute in Cork etc. The farm and horticulture unit were particularly relevant to the latter programme which had been developed for the vocational rather than the secondary school sector. While it is fair to say that Thomond made rather limited use of the farm, the University had no interest in it. Both facilities were shut down and the relevant staff members were immediately redeployed.

This close association between Thomond and the VECs was also reflected in the constitution of the Governing Authority of Thomond and in the fact that that the first (and only) post-graduate teacher education programme at Thomond was the Graduate Diploma in Education

(Business). This programme was intended to prepare teachers teach Secretarial skills such as shorthand and typing because Secretarial Studies were an important dimension in the vocational education sector. It was a H. Dip. by another name really. But the interesting part of that is that it identifies again the vocational orientation of Thomond, parallel to the General and Rural Science story. In passing it is also noteworthy that the curriculum design team for the Grad Dip in Education (Business) programme, under the leadership of Diarmuid Leonard, moved away from the traditional NUI H. Dip. model insofar as they adopted a forward-looking thematic rather than a Foundation Disciplines approach.

General and Rural Science had not been as popular an option as Construction and Engineering... But in my time the biggest Rural Science class would have had about thirty and then it was reduced to about fifteen. The points required weren't particularly high for it. It is noteworthy that, once integration happened, the University shifted away very quickly from General and Rural Science. Traditionally, General and Rural Science graduates were regarded by the Registration Council as qualified to teach Agricultural Science and Biology to Leaving Cert as well as junior cycle Science. Now, General and Rural Science had been a Group Cert rather than an Inter Cert. subject and Horticulture was an important aspect of this course. That distinction was abolished with the introduction of the Junior Cert in 1989 with the result that the distinction between secondary Science and General and Rural Science no longer obtained. So, against that background the General and Rural Science focus of science education at Limerick was quickly dropped immediately after integration. In the new university scenario the B.Sc. (Ed) was recalibrated so that graduates could teach Biology and either Physics or Chemistry. And Agricultural Science, always a minority subject in

schools was, I think, included as well. And in more recent times there's been a Science teaching programme for teachers of Physics and Chemistry.

### **I. There was also Physical Education?**

The National College for Physical Education (NCPE) was established at Plassey about six years before Thomond. PE was by far the most highly sought after programme as reflected in the high CAO points needed to get in. Immediately after integration the College of Education included Physical Education. The Physical Education electives were more general and secondary school oriented – Gaelige, English, Geography, Mathematics and Chemistry (though these had been subject to change since the foundation of the National College for Physical Education). This programme used to be called a BA in Physical Education. It was decided that, I think in the late '90s, that, even though most of the Physical Education electives were more appropriate to a BA, to change the title of the programme to B.Sc ... This was done for economic, financial reasons, because B.Sc. would draw in better funding than a BA, and the Sports Science degree had also been introduced soon after integration. So while that department was originally called PE, it became PESS when Sports Science was introduced and the department went into Engineering and Science for a period.... Then at the next reconfiguration of colleges the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences was established and PESS is now part of that Faculty. So it's, yes, it's an interesting case actually.

**I.: You mentioned the efforts made to develop Equine Science at Thomond College?**

JG.: Yes, the integration didn't just happen in one full swoop. There was naturally a lead in time ... Thomond people were going to occasional meetings at the Department and coming home with the information that there was a greater likelihood that Thomond would not continue as an independent entity. The general view was that a dedicated teacher ed. institution couldn't survive without diversification. Others would know much more about the alternatives that were considered and I suppose the minutes of Thomond Governing Body – if they have survived – would shed some light on that.

For whatever reason was the notion of developing a programme in Equine Studies emerged. So there were various meetings I know between senior admin. people, Frank McGourty, as Head of General and Rural Science became the champion for this if you like. As far as I remember Thomond had one or two years of that programme before the integration and then it went into the university and Frank McGourty maintained his relationship with it for quite a while, and I think Frank would be a very interesting interview on this. That programme remains part of the University offerings and it has a strong distance learning element ...

**I: So you were in a good position to observe developments as TCE bedded in to the university**

JG.: As I said earlier the Department of Education controlled tightly the annual intake into Thomond College so that the maximum intake was set at eighty students per annum which meant you only had about 300 students in total. But once integration happened the university had the freedom to set its own targets and the numbers coming into teacher education began to increase exponentially.... By the early noughties that

had over 300 per annum of an intake into the teacher ed. and we still had basically the four same teacher education programmes. Foreign Languages came on as a fifth stream sometime in the noughties at undergraduate level while the number of Graduate Diploma options increased exponentially from just one at Thomond – Business – to include Music, Technology, PE and Languages and Maths.

It was always going to take quite a while for the Education Department to get increases in staff numbers. So, during the late '90s and especially in the early noughties, staffing was a huge issue, both in terms of teaching and teaching loads, teaching practice tutoring and even representation at meetings. I remember how Tom Geary, who was by now Head of the Department, and I used to joke about needing to bring in a change of jacket so that you wouldn't look like the same guy was showing up at all the meetings every day! Because if you didn't attend meetings you were losing out on policy making and so on. So that became a major issue.

So, while the numbers of student teachers were growing, no staff appointments were being made in Education. As I and other members of the department saw it, we were a small department in terms of numbers. When Roger Downer replaced Ed Walsh as President in 1998. Kieran Byrne resumed the position of Dean of Education after his stint as Vice-President Academic. John O'Brien now had the role of Assistant to the Dean for Academic Affairs.

Morale was very low in the Department of Education and Professional Studies, with the distance between the Dean and the rather scarce troops on the ground growing apace. It became clear that Roger Downer had concerns regarding the relationship between the Dean and his faculty

members with some of them making formal representations to the President. While Roger held meetings with Diarmuid Leonard and with me, nothing came out of that for whatever reason and other issues moved into that space.

The staffing issue would eventually be resolved itself today because the increased student numbers facilitated more appointments. And numbers of student teacher numbers have now begun to decline for a couple of reasons. One is the two-tier pay system for teachers. Secondly the post-graduate Diploma is now a two-year Master's qualification and that's obviously more expensive for students.

**I.: What other issues emerged as the College of Education settled in to this new university environment?**

There were all sorts of simplistic perceptions around how teacher education .... Along with a strong sense that there was very little involved in teacher education, that teaching is simple, that it was about making sure that people could produce clear overhead transparencies, write clearly on the blackboard, be good disciplinarians and know their subject and that this was all there was to it.

Such tensions emerged mostly at Faculty Board meetings. Like all other faculties, Education nominated representatives to Faculty Boards. Since some three quarters of subject-related modules taken by student teachers were taught by members of this faculty (many former TCE staff) I opted to be one of the two Education representatives on the College of Engineering and Science board. Now that was a rather difficult environment where one felt completely outnumbered and misunderstood.

Most members of this Board had no understanding of what teacher education was about and there was scant respect for the needs and identity of teacher education. Since the members had scant regard for teacher education (they were not alone in this) being an Education rep on this Board was like going into the lion's den! I recall for example how the E&S Dean of the day put me down with the statement that 'Education studies are about counting the number of angels on the head of a pin'. In other words, it was dealing with very esoteric concepts that weren't of any relevance to the real world. Such sentiments were subsequently echoed in the characterization of Education studies by a Humanities lecturer 'as a load of obviousness'.

The late *Irish Times* journalist John Healy used to refer to peripheral public representatives who were not at the Cabinet table as 'hind tit' TDs and that's certainly how I would have felt within the university environment. While other Departments were getting additional resources what we saw was incremental growth in student teacher numbers at a time when our morale was at a low ebb. Meanwhile CAO points for Education courses remained comparatively high. This helped the public profile of the university and encouraged higher student intakes. It takes time for resources to follow such increases and our workloads continued to grow. Teacher education was a 'cash cow'. all about bums on seats – a rather familiar story for university Education Departments. During the early noughties we had a standing joke about the need to bring a change of clothes for the afternoon so that others wouldn't cop on that the same few of us were showing up at meetings all the time.

Sometime around 1997 the name of the Department changed to 'Education and Professional Studies'. The Professional Studies part was

introduced to reflect the introduction of a Diploma Programme in Systemic Family Therapy which had been promoted by the Acting Dean arising from his work with the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council. It was also around this time that we adopted the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). This arose from the Bologna Declaration, driven by our European partners. Ireland wanted to be the best boys in the class and UL was more than happy to uncritically embrace this new system with its questionable emphasis on behaviourist student learning outcomes. Diarmuid Leonard was no longer in the Department and I had no allies when it came to challenging this development. I would however subsequently publish a paper in the journal, *Studies in Higher Education*, where I argued that we were putting product before process.

**I: So, moving on, what was your professional life like after you had completed your four years as Head of Department?**

JG.: Yes, having completed four years as Head of Department in August '95, I was given a sabbatical from September '95 to August '96. Having intercalated for all my time as HoD I used this opportunity to resume my PhD studies at East Anglia. During six weeks on campus there I went through the M. Phil process to proceed to the doctoral register and completed an excellent six-week research methods course at UEA. I resumed teaching and had a lot of data to gather for the doctorate as well as continuing with my literature search.

Having collected my research data I graduated in 2000 I continued to teach and re-engage with curriculum development and evaluation... the most obvious and important and positive development of the integration was the increased emphasis on research and the pressure to publish. And I

began to take on research student supervisions. Around this time Diarmuid Leonard and I established of the Master's in Educational Management/Leadership for which I was course leader. Five or six cohorts (2-15 per cohort) took that programme. With EU funding from the PETRA project where the late John McCarthy was Project Leader we developed a Diploma in Vocational Education and Training aimed at those working in Youthreach Centres, Community Training Workshops, Traveller Education etc.... While this programme, which was of obvious relevance in view of Thomond's strong links with vocational education, there was little appetite for it at UL and it was only offered on two occasions as far as I remember. I think that well-known problem of parity of esteem for vocational education programmes was behind this ...

On leaving the HoD position then, my responsibilities include both post-grad and undergrad teaching, research supervision and of course there was the whole issue of teaching practice supervision. As the numbers grew, it became necessary to take on board external people, retired teachers very often to help with the latter. And there was always in my view a huge ... dissonance when it came to how practitioners saw teacher education and how the academics saw teacher education. A distance that has not been solved, I don't know has it been solved anywhere else either and a gap that grows wider and wider according as academics are pressurized more and more, to do more research and writing. That gap only continues to grow.

Following the pay deal for secondary teachers in the noughties, where they got a really big increase with very few strings attached, and alongside the cutbacks in third level, the net effect was that new posts were invariably advertised below the bar, at assistant lecturer level. As

such, they were quite unattractive to experienced teachers, who had masters, and would have made fine teacher educators, but would have taken a pay cut to come and work in teacher education. In addition the university began to demand doctorates before they would appoint people. While teachers got fifteen per cent in that pay rise, higher education got three per cent. So that made an imbalance, and you weren't able to appoint people at lecturer level, you had to appoint them at assistant lecturer level, they were expected to have doctorates, the net effect of that was that teacher ed. began to be populated increasingly by very able, young, people, many of whom either had finished doctorates or were in the process of finishing them, but had precious little if any, teaching experience. And that's another aspect of this theory/ practice divide that I mentioned a minute ago. The more you focus on doing research the more you lose touch with schools. And the gap, dare I say chasm, continues to widen between practitioners in schools and teacher educators in the university. I think that is a big problem, a growing problem for teacher ed. Their publications are gone way up but their level of experience of the system and of teaching have diminished dramatically. That's a huge shift.

**I.: In 2001 you became Director of the Curriculum and Policy Development and Research unit? Would you like to tell me something about that?**

JG. : Yes, the establishment of Research Centres marked a new stage in the promotion of research within the university. Teresa O' Doherty who would subsequently become Head of Education at Mary Immaculate and President of Marino Institute of Education, was Assistant Dean Research in the faculty and she encouraged some of us to begin to establish more formal structures for work we had been doing.... for example, in my case

in curriculum research and development. We did not have the critical mass for a Centre so we set up this Unit whose activities included an independent evaluation of Young Social Innovators, a study of the treatment of Development Education in Irish second-level schools and a study of parental attitudes to the Exploring Masculinities intervention. Many of these activities afforded doctoral students including Joanne O’Flaherty and Orla McCormack to cut their research teeth as it were... Of course educational research has advanced considerably in the meantime but I remain very proud of what I achieved in the circumstances. As previously indicated research was not promoted whatsoever in Thomond unless one went on secondment as I did, then I had four years as HoD with another four to complete my PhD. By then I was 56 years of age. The Australian position did enable me to catch up somewhat... Nowadays the main focus in my old Department is on research in an environment of ‘publish or perish’!!

**I. : Do you want to talk about the last years or the later years of your career here?.**

JG.: The Chair of Education had remained empty since the departure of Jim McKernan in 1993. It was advertised in 2001 and again in 2007 before finally being filled in 2009 when Marie Parker-Jenkins was appointed. I applied in ’01 and ’07. In 2001 four candidates were shortlisted, three of whom were internal and the Board decided to offer the position to Professor Byrne. However, the ratification of his appointment by the Governing Authority was delayed because all three other candidates submitted appeals regarding various aspects of the selection process. Soon afterwards Professor Byrne was appointed Director of Waterford Institute of Technology and the UL Chair remained unfilled for six more years. Some six candidates were interviewed in 2007. I was

the sole internal candidate – there was also a candidate from Mary Immaculate College. Dr (now Professor) John O’Neill from New Zealand (with Waterford connections) was appointed but could not take up the position for domestic reasons. This meant that the Chair had been vacant for 15 years when Marie Parker-Jenkins was appointed in 2009. One wonders if this situation would have been tolerated in any other faculty!! Times change, and there are now three Chairs at the disposal of the School of Education.

I would have applied for promotion from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer a couple of times in the noughties at a time when a relatively small number of candidates from across all faculties were appointed in rank order based on submitted applications. This system would change around 2012 so that *all* those deemed qualified were automatically promoted. My feedback said that I wasn't selling myself well enough in my written application. But there was another important factor in my case... within the academy the perceived differences between empirical type research and the more school-based action research and curriculum development work that I had engaged with involving real teachers in real schools, with real kids, developing and evaluating curriculum. Another consideration is that Thomond did not have a culture of publishing in refereed journals and it took me some time to catch up there. As far as I can recall my promotion to SL came in 2005.

Meanwhile I continued to teach my units which I always enjoyed greatly.... my undergrad teaching was always with year three and four at that stage – Curriculum Studies, Teacher as Professional and Understanding Schools. I mostly engaged with third and fourth year students, having three of their four modules in Part Two of the

programme. Around that time I enjoyed my involvement with SCoTENS, the North/South network of teacher educators on the island.

I wrote something to the *Irish Times* recently where I said that ‘if I had a euro for every student teacher who told me that nothing would change until assessment changed in schools, I'd be a rich man!’. What I can't understand is what happened to them all when they went into schools, because they are now opposing assessment changes as members of their unions, particularly ASTI, but that's by the way.

I was an elected member of Academic Council (second visit there, HoD days were first) from 2008-2011 and was nominated by the heads of universities to the first Teaching Council, so that took up a great deal of my time in those latter years insofar as I probably had a meeting a week there during the academic year... most of these would have been in Maynooth where the Council offices were. And at this time I was writing a lot more and I had more research supervisions.

**I.: So in fact you took early retirement?**

JG.: No, I didn't, no. I hit sixty-five and I had no plan B and I didn't want to retire, didn't feel ready to retire. I was only getting into my stride in terms of research and writing and yes, an opportunity came up at Australian Catholic University that matched my profile and expertise ... so that's when I became Professor of Identity and Curriculum in Catholic Education there, based on the Brisbane campus.

The identity part of the title to do with the interesting question of the identity of faith-based schools. What is a Catholic school anymore, now that the religious have moved out of them? To what extent is it possible

to express the faith-based identity of a school across the curriculum, beyond Religious Education, or indeed is that appropriate? What is the point of Catholic schools?

This interview took place in January 2017 during my Christmas visit to Ireland. I didn't get around to finally checking and submitting the text to the archive until 2020 by which time my contract at ACU had ended and I was back in Limerick with an appointment as Adjunct Professor at the Institute of Education, Dublin City University.

**I.: When you look back at your career in Thomond, and then at the University of Limerick what are your highlights?**

JG.: Oh, that's a very hard question Catherine. Teaching.... I always enjoyed teaching, so ... teaching invigorated me. I'm fairly confident that my students would have said – whatever they felt about my views – that I was fair and committed to the importance of asking why, who's doing what to whom here and why are they doing it? I clearly believed in reform and change and railed at the conservatism of schools in Ireland and the rote learning stuff and the lowest common denominator mentality about change and so on. So, I would like to think that students would have always found me enthusiastic and say that I believed in what I was lecturing about. My big thing with students was that the teachers out there aren't going to change much, you are the future. So, teaching was a highlight, yes. The success of the Leaving Certificate Applied (notwithstanding poor support from the DES), getting stuff published, graduating PhDs were all highlights.

Looking back now at the integration of teacher ed. at Limerick, I think that one of the most significant events was the 1991 special meeting of Academic Council of dedicated to the creation of the College of Education. The agreed criteria for membership of the College of Education and the responsibilities of that College stated quite clearly that all student teachers would belong to the College of Education. Now that was always going to be contentious in a scenario where 75-80% of student teachers' modules were provided by other faculties. On the other hand, these were student teachers and their choice of profession marked them out. We were providing education studies and preparing them for the teaching profession. And, you know, if they were to belong to two different colleges or departments or something, that was going to end up in a mess.

Teacher preparation is not just about transmitting knowledge, passing exams, passing teaching practices. There's also the whole question of the moral role of the teacher and the broader aspect of the personal development of the teacher and in that sense, somebody has to be recognized as having primary responsibility for that and that to me seems to be drifting a lot. This has become all the more important since the establishment of the Teaching Council in 2006 and the publication of its Code of Conduct.

But the July 1991 Academic Council decision began to unravel soon enough with the concept of joint faculty membership for students coming on the agenda... so while the School of Education has grown a lot, it has less and less ownership of the students. The alternative view was always that Education should just be a service department and that the students should belong to where they're getting most of their teaching

from. It's moving more and more towards that idea of education as a service department, which of course on the one hand, frees people up to do more and more research at a time when 'publish or perish' is the mantra. I fear that the chasm between the academy and schools, theory and practice, is growing wider all the time.

I cannot help wondering about the development of teacher education and Education Studies at Limerick had our first Professor been given time to settle in and chart the future of a Faculty that went into serious decline between 1994 and 2002.... Or what would have happened if Ed Walsh's favoured candidate for the Chair of Education (Áine Hyland) as revealed in his autobiography had been selected by the interview panel in December 1991?

The difficulty in attracting experienced teachers into a School of Education is another major concern of mine.... Today this School is increasingly populated by recent graduates who have moved straight into research and university teaching with very little experience of teaching and schools beyond their own schooling. This poses major questions for the future of teacher education and for its perceived relevance and credibility in schools .... And it creates an environment where student teachers are increasingly influenced by co-operating teachers who have little or no awareness or appreciation of the campus-based programme or expectations.

From a personal perspective the focus on research and the opportunities and motivation to publish have been particularly enjoyable and fulfilling. The big issue of course is how to achieve balance between the demands

of research on the one hand and labour intensive nature of quality teacher education.