University of Limerick Oral History Project (ULOHP)

Introduction

The University of Limerick Oral History Project (ULOHP) aims to create and archive an oral history of the University of Limerick (UL). From its foundation in 1972 as the National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE) with an initial cohort of 114 students at Plassey House, the University has led the way in pioneering and innovative third-level educational development. It has combined exemplary teaching and research programmes with a tradition of dedication to the wider economic and social needs of both Limerick and the national community. The purpose of the ULOHP is to create a digital archive recording the personal contribution and memories of those who were part of the foundation and development of the NIHE and, from 1989, the University of Limerick.

These personal narratives in audio and written format, present a rich portrait of the place and people that make up the University of Limerick. Founding academics and administrative staff, together with local and national public figures, revisit in their own words, memories of their contribution and personal milestones in the history of UL. Their narratives are of necessity subjective accounts. Oral histories help us to understand 'not just what people did but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.'\(^1\) They record a personal interpretation of events and while factual inconsistencies may occur they provide a valuable contribution to the creation of the historical record. These important oral histories will be available for consultation to present and future students of the University as well as the wider community.

Project Methodology.

The ULOHP was initiated on 1 September 2008 by the office of the Vice President Academic & Registrar, Professor Paul McCutcheon, in preparation for the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the foundation of the NIHE in 2012. The Project is overseen by a steering committee consisting of Professor McCutcheon and Professor Alessandro Portelli, ‘What makes oral history different?’ in R.Perks and AThomson (eds.), The Oral History Reader, Third Edition (London, 2016), pp.48-57,p.52.
Bernadette Whelan, Department of History, UL. The work of Project Officer, Dr. Catherine O’Connor includes the identification and contact of interviewees, questionnaire design, the conduct and transcription of recorded interviews and the digitisation of material to archival standard.

Interviewees are invited to discuss their personal contribution and memories of UL in a semi-structured interview format. In accordance with best practice oral history ethical standards, each interviewee is afforded the opportunity to fully review and if necessary, amend the interview transcript before it is deposited to the ULOHP Archive at the Digital Library, UL. The unamended interview audio recording is deposited to a separate Project archive in Special Collections at the Library under a moratorium of twenty years. Both deposits require the full signed consent of participants. Each interviewee is invited to add a personal biography to the collection.

The Project is an ongoing one. Some of the themes that have been addressed in the Project interviews to date include:

The demand for a University in Limerick prior to 1970.
The appointment of the Director and Planning Board, 1970.
Opening of the NIHE, 1972.
First Graduation, 1977.
Institutional development.
Curriculum/educational mission.
Physical development.
Cultural and sporting activity.
University status 1989 and subsequent amalgamation with Thomond College of Education.
Continued expansion and development.