

University of Limerick Oral History Project (ULOHP)

Interview with Mr. Dermot Coughlan

2 May 2014.

I.: Dermot, thank you very much for speaking to me today. Would you like to introduce yourself and maybe give me some biographical detail?

DC: Not at all. Thanks for the invitation Catherine. Dermot Coughlan. Most people around Limerick would probably pronounce that 'Cocklan' but I'm originally from Cork and we pronounce it Coughlan, particularly in the city centre. And I recently retired from the University as Director of Lifelong Learning, but prior to that, from 1987 to the year 2000, I was Head of Personnel at the University. I came to the University, I suppose at an exciting time, in '87, and I came, I suppose with a diverse or chequered career. I left school at eighteen or thereabouts, and didn't go to University, so I was, I suppose in some ways, a product of what I eventually became, a lifelong learner. Having left school I tried my hand at accountancy, that didn't work, and subsequently I worked for the ... what was then the Irish Transport and General Worker's Union, which is now SIPTU, Ireland's biggest trade union at the time. And I worked as a trade union official for five years, working in the East Cork area. And again, a very exciting time, at that time in the ... in the seventies.

Subsequent to that, I moved to Dublin and took up a position with RTE. I jumped from one side of the table to the other at that stage, from being a trade union official representing workers to now being a staff relations officer with the national broadcasting organisation. And I spent four years there and subsequent to that I moved to the Health Services, where I took my first senior position in Personnel as it was; now, I'll be using Personnel and Human Resources interchangeably because I grew up with Personnel, but this new term Human Resources seems to have crept in as well. But anyway, again I seem to do things in bulks of five, because I also stayed about five years with the Health Service and was responsible for some interesting initiatives but some ones that I probably look back and say maybe they weren't the best thing that we ever did in Health

Services. Basically it was the closure of seven, of the, what were then known as the Dublin Protestant hospitals, hospitals like Sir Patrick Dunn's, Mercers and hospitals that had actually a fantastic tradition and history in the medical world. And we closed them and we moved their services and personnel to two major locations, one was St. James' Hospital and the other was Tallaght.

And then that brought me in 1987, I suppose I can't say it was a very deliberate move to come to the University of Limerick. My wife and myself, we had just had our first child at this stage or maybe she was a couple of years old and we decided Dublin wasn't the place to raise a child so we decided to try and get back nearer home. Our parents were getting old as well so it was nice to be at home. So I was looking for various positions and of course when you're looking for something it rarely comes and the more you look, the harder it becomes. But then, as the other thing that always happens in such cases, that when you don't have one, all of a sudden two come in the door and you have to decide which one. And the option was to take the position either with Ericksons in Athlone or the University, the NIHE as it was then. And after much deliberation and I have to say a very geographic decision, Limerick was nearer to Cork where both our sets of parents were, so!. And I must say coming to Limerick was, in 1987, was quite interesting but also quite a shock. I remember we were invited by the then Registrar, Leo Colgan, to come and spend a weekend and get to know Limerick, as you can do on a weekend, and I always remember coming down, we were put up in a very nice hotel, Jurys hotel in town and we walking around town, and my wife with the buggy and myself and she turned to me and said 'where do I do shopping here? There are no shops', and ... but then we had a very pleasant weekend and we met people like John O' Connor who was then the Director of Finance and we had some very nice meals and some very nice bottles of wine, and eventually I decided that I would come to Limerick. And I came in May of '87.

And ... it was quite a different place to what you see now, just in terms of the size and the layout of the campus. It was also interesting, I suppose I should say at this stage, because people were probably wondering who was responsible for bringing this person into the University. On the interview board that interviewed

me, was chaired by Leo Colgan, John O' Connor also sat on the board, Noel Mulcahy who was then Dean of Engineering and Science - a subtle change coming later on, when Kieran Hodnett changed that to Science and Engineering but we won't go into that either maybe! But, also as we're sitting here in the location of what was then the College of Humanities, the other member of the board was a member of the Governing Authority, Dick Haslam, who was also a member of the faculty, in Public Admin. here in the College of Humanities as it was then. We had, I think we had four Colleges when I arrived, we had the College of Business, we had the College of Humanities, we had the College of Engineering and Science, and I can't remember the other one ... but anyway. So, as I said, it was a smallish organisation at that time and when I arrived there were just three people working in Personnel, along with myself. There was Anne Smith, a quintessential person around the NIHE then, Avril Hogan and Brenda Andrews. Of those, Avril is still working at the University and must now be the longest serving staff member in the University and that's the way it was and that's the way it was when I came and it was a very interesting time at that stage.

A lot of developments and I remember attending the first meeting of what was then called MCG, Management Coordinating Group. I could never figure out which one of those three words was actually applied to the group, but anyway, that's another issue. And I was asked by the then President, Ed Walsh to say a few words to the MCG. MCG was basically the Heads of all Departments, academic and administrative and they met once a month, the first Wednesday of every month, ten o'clock in the Board Room of Plassey House, and I was just asked to say a few words. And I just said it was an exciting time to be coming to something, I had just spent five years closing down institutions in Dublin, so it was a joy to come to something that was expanding, growing. And there was a vibrancy in the organisation. I think the other thing was that, what was evident to me at that stage was that while in any organisation there were the challenges and there would be differences of opinion, there seemed to be a unity of purpose associated with the whole organisation and I think that gave it a fabulous focus. I think also there would have been, above the group that I've just referred to, the MCG management group, there was of course a thing called the Executive

Committee. And the Executive Committee was basically Ed, the Registrar, the Deans, and then the Director of Finance and the Director of, as it was, Library and Information Services at that stage and Cooperative Education & External Affairs.. And then I think the, I suppose one of the abiding thoughts that I would have, would look at maybe the changes that have occurred in how we manage the University. I think the management of the University in those early years, the early years for me, that is, '87 onwards, were really dynamic, you know, and you didn't have a huge bureaucracy to go through to get things done. That doesn't mean that we rushed into everything, things were thought through, but once the decision was taken, and we could actually do it and that was something that has characterised, and would characterise any organisation as it grows into the size of the organisation that we have here at UL at the moment.

I think the early years, obviously I had to get to know the organisation, had to get to know how it functioned. Quite frankly I 'm not sure how it functioned sometimes, but it did and there were great characters and great individuals, you know, working with people at that time, people like Roy Hayhurst, Paddy Doran, Noel Mulcahy. They were fabulous people to work with and the Heads of Department were equally very supportive of me in my role, because I was coming and I was, had some new ideas, and maybe not all were going to be welcomed with open arms. And you know, at that time in the eighties, nationally and indeed internationally, the area of personnel management was very much defined by 'them and us' type situation, where you had management on one side and workers on the other side, and despite the fact that we tried very hard to break those divisions down, they remained for a long time, not in a very robust way, I suppose in some ways, although we did have, in those days we actually did have strikes, and various other walk outs and lock outs and all sorts of things, which have disappeared. And one can look back at that and say yes, its fantastic that they have disappeared, we have reached a stage where there's far more emphasis on ... building an organisation together, I think that's fantastic.

Equally, however, I would say I would look back, look at the Union activists, that were involved in the early days. And people that I would recall would have been

Marion Healy, who would have been we'll say the Admin. side of the house, a representative of the ASTMS, they became the MSF and various other configurations, and I'm struggling now to find out what they're now called! But they're called something. So you had Marion Healy on the Administrative side, you had Mary Guilfoyle on the Library side, you had the likes of Joe Wallace on the academic side and the one thing that hasn't changed I suppose, is that Robert Hutchinson is still the Technician representative and was then.

And it was, as I said it was ... a far more challenging environment involved in some ways in managing the organization back in the eighties. I could tell many good stories of the long negotiations that went into the night. And rowing and fighting and whatever, but I think we always managed even after the big rows and after the various things, that we were able to stand back and get on with each other. That we were, both sides really had the organization at heart. Obviously, different ways of doing it, but nonetheless, you know, it was good. I think the other thing was of course, the Executive, I suppose the Executive were the real leadership that emanated from somebody like Ed at the time. And it was such a driving force that it was bound to create severe tensions at times, because he was such a driven individual, you know that there were going to be difficulties. We had the, you know, the breaking pencils situation, we had all sorts of different incidents, when we would run into difficulties. And we had some serious difficulties, there's no doubt about it. We had a lot of strife as well as a few strikes in the organisation, but again I think we managed that and I think the organisation probably became better for it, as a result of the way that the rows did take place and were patched up, we went on to be a stronger organisation.

And again I think, as I referred to earlier, this unitary of purpose, it took me a while to understand what the unitary of purpose was because I was new and you know, already the organisation was now fifteen years old when I came into it. And I was still on a learning curve, and of course it became very clear afterwards, what this unitary of purpose was, and that was of course, Ed's intention that the NIHE would become a University. And irrespective of whether you liked Ed or you fought with Ed, or whatever you thought of him, and various other people

around the organisation, there was this thing that pulled us all back together and said listen we're going for this and 'let's do it'. And of course, you know, ultimately we were successful in doing that and that was I think, now, I suppose in some ways then immediately after we got the university status, in 1989, we were faced with another significant challenge and that was the integration of Thomond College, which happened in 1991. And we did that successfully as well, and it has blossomed and in some ways, you know, the merger of Thomond. I think the official title was integration of Thomond, but it doesn't really matter, the end of it was, that we had a very strong, and what it really did was it developed the whole issue, it developed the whole faculty situation, to this day. Because we now had probably a huge faculty of Education, subsequent to our link up with Mary I, in later years meant that we became the largest faculty of Education in the country.

So I think that after a while the issue then was quite clear, that the unitary of purpose had been achieved, and then I think a few things happened. Obviously the University continued to grow and develop, things like the Foundation and working with them. I recall some very funny incidents around the appointment of the very first funded Chair into the organisation, which was funded by, was it the Chair in Project Management. Of course there was always the row, where would it sit first of all, pardon the pun, with the Chair, you know, because Project Management was seen as part of Civil Engineering, and Civil engineering, we didn't have that discipline, per se, in the University at the time and there was also the issue of Business, and there was, people could fight about that and eventually we decided that it would reside in the college of Business, but the whole recruitment process and the involvement of M.F. Kent and some of their senior executives in the recruitment process, probably some of the colourful language that was used, which I won't repeat now.

But we had a really good time and the first Chair was appointed and that was an exciting time. I always remember one thing which I think I can repeat about that. M.F. Kent ... the Head of the Foundation at the time was Malachy and Malachy was a guy from Mayo, and had played football for Mayo in his early

years, but had subsequently emigrated to the States, but now back and as brash an American as you'd ever come across. To say that he was a rough diamond was probably an understatement. But Malachy was a great character, but he had negotiated with M.F. Kent, Gus Kearney the Chief Executive, or whatever his title was, and Gus and Malachy had come to an agreement that they would contribute half a million in funds towards the chair. This was a very significant contribution but as negotiations developed and they were coming very close to actually signing the document, actually on the day of the signature and Ed was very excited about the whole thing, he was getting half a million pounds, which was brilliant. And in the middle of the signing Malachy turned to Gus, Gus Kearney, and said, 'Mr. Kearney, is your organization often associated with half of something?' I can remember Ed's face dropped. I said this is going to be either brilliant or a disaster. As it turned out Malachy was a good poker player, and Gus Kearney changed the cheque from 500,000 to 750,000 pounds, you know.

So these things, I recall these very funny incidents around that particular appointment. As it turned out, actually that whole chair, you could write a book about it in its own right, because subsequently, after the first appointment, who was a Scotsman, whose name I can't remember, a lovely man, he didn't stay very long. And we subsequently appointed another individual, Bert Hamilton, was his name, a very colourful guy as well, a very successful guy in developing the whole Project Management discipline within the organisation. I recall very significant contracts with a wide range of organisations the biggest one I think was with the Telia organization in Sweden and they were sending huge numbers of their organisation here to take Masters in Project Management, it was absolutely fantastic. But Bert had his own way of doing business, and subsequently that kind of, caused problems and Bert and the University parted ways, rather acrimoniously, but these things happen.

So you know, these, that's a kind of a particular development. Other particular developments that I recall would have been the introduction of for instance, Japanese studies, into the University. I recall the appointment of the first Lecturer in Japanese studies in the University, Mara Kuhne O' Leary, she was

married to a Corkman, and I recall that because it was quite funny, and I'll probably be accused of being, definitely sexist anyway at this rate, but the appointee and the Head of Department could never get on. It was a classic case, these two ladies just could not get on, you know, and it was, you know, I spent an awful lot of time, and eventually, the row between the two individuals came to such that the Union decided to have a strike, because of harassment or whatever of the appointee, the lady Mara, and the then Head of Department, of Languages and Cultural Studies at the time, Joyce O' Connor, now known for something else. But Joyce and herself just couldn't get on, and in any event there was a major Union ... meeting called, and it was in the John Holland Lecture Theatre, and it was full to capacity, and it was making a decision to take a vote on strike.

It was also a time when you were actually allowed to smoke in the building, and, so the meeting was progressing and of course I wasn't there, so I'm relying on being told what happened at the meeting, but I think the truth is being borne out. And at some stage, just before they were going to take a vote on the strike, a male member of the faculty, a senior member, a Head of Department, well known for his smoking of the pipe, stood up and took a big drag on his pipe, and filled the room with a puff of smoke and declared that he would fight for anything, but he was not going to go on strike because of two squabbling women! Whereupon the meeting broke up in disorder. Other senior faculty members, people like Geraldine Sheridan, was a very senior faculty member in the French area, and there was almost physical assaults around the thing, and it broke up and the strike never took place. Unfortunately Mara left the organization and we had difficulty with the Japanese embassy afterwards because of the way she went. We had to mend a lot of fences after that.

But again it's fantastic to see that those early years, the seeds and the turbulence that were around the development of Japanese studies at the time and I now look at the way that Barbara Geraghty has developed it into such a fabulous thing, you know, and getting awards left, right left and centre, awards for her teaching and the number of students that they're turning out. And in some ways its like rearing children I suppose, in some ways, you know, you'll always have your



difficulties along the way. So there were, there was fabulous times, and I think the changes, there were major changes in the University, for that ten years when I was Head of Personnel, the rows that we had with the Higher Education Authority ... one of the things that we really had to fight with the Higher Education Authority at that time, those ten years, was the equalisation of salary scales, and this was very important, obviously. So we had to get equalisation of salary scales for the academics, for technicians and for the administrative staff.

Now in a way it was quite easy for the equalisation of the academic salary scales, and indeed for the technical salary scales, because, you know, a lecturer is a lecturer, is a lecturer, it doesn't matter if the lecturer is in DCU, UCD or UL. So therefore there was a kind of a ... but while saying that it should be easy, it wasn't. The Department of Education and the Higher Education Authority fought tooth and nail to ensure that we weren't equal with the other Universities, and it took a huge amount of time and gradually, gradually, gradually we managed to get it ... you know... the last, I remember the last big battle we had was the introduction of Associate Professor grade. And that was fought with, you know, they really fought that one, tooth and nail. And again, Ed being Ed, said 'well, look, we're just going to create Associate Professors', and I remember the Board, and we appointed I think the first six Associate Professors, and we just appointed them! Now appointing them was probably, might be, too strong a word in some ways, because we actually couldn't pay them anything. We just gave them the title Associate Professor and that was it.

So those developments were very significant for the University at that time to ensure that we got, not just parity of esteem but that we actually got parity of pay. So we had huge rows with Education and the HEA. But we did, and eventually, you know, we got it. Now I think, you know, after I left there was probably still, in the year 2000, there was probably still a bit of tidying up to be done in the actual scales to be paid, in actual fact I think the whole issue of the Associate Professors thing was never actually finalised and still isn't finalised in that I think the Associate Professors in the other universities are paid more than the Associate Professors here in UL, as far as I know, at this stage. But they were

very important developments so we spent a lot of time you know, with John O'Connor and myself going up and down to the Higher Education Authority, and indeed Leo Colgan, you know, battling away through the HEA, going to the Labour Court. And normally when you end up in these situations where you go into the Labour Court or you go into negotiations with the Labour Relations Commission, normally there is a fairly, you know, decent stand between what the Union is saying and what the management is saying. But we had several, you know, sessions in the Labour Court and in the Labour Relations Commission, where we were actually, you know, agreeing with the Trade Union.

But where the Department of Education who would come along in those days ... putting the case that no, you couldn't have equalisation of salary scales. And the last one, well as I said, well, apart from the Associate Professor, the administrative structure was a little bit more difficult to settle. But again we eventually got that into a state where significant benefits did accrue to the staff and I think our salary scales across the board now are probably as good if not better than the other universities. As I said, they are better technical grades and technician grades, they are definitely just, a lecturer is a lecturer now, and they are paid the same in Dublin as they are in Cork, or as in Galway, or whatever. So there might be little tweaks in the administrative side but I think in general our rates of pay are now very much in keeping with what is outside and right across the University sector. But it was, it was a difficult task and they were, you know, there were fun times as well, because as I said, it was an unusual position for the unions and the management going into meetings saying we don't actually have a problem with this; but we had a problem with Education when we used to say things like that but we eventually did it and it was fun.

I think the other things, interesting things that I noticed during those years were the development of the role of the Governing Authority, the Governing Body as it was then. I suppose when I came in '87, the Governing Body was very much ... I suppose, it really didn't, it functioned, but really of course it functioned as an arm of the Executive, rather than anything else. I remember you know, working with the various members of the Governing Body at that stage. Their sole function at

that stage was to turn up for interview boards and be chairing interview boards. They really didn't, we didn't have all of the interview sub committees that we have now with Governing Authority . Nor did we have the same level of staff participation or staff membership of the Governing Authority. So that was a significant change. And styles also changed because you had, you know, the one that I recall was when Jack Daly became the Chairman of the Governing Authority. And that brought with it a lot of angst in the organization and looking back on it, it probably, we spent so much time rowing with ourselves in some ways, that we lost the plot in some ways under that particular regime in Governing Authority, in my view ... because I think Jack saw himself as very much in the role as an Executive Chairman, and not a non Executive Chairman. Now it would have been a different view ... indeed from some of the staff who were now members of Governing Authority, who would have seen this as a way of reining in the power of the Executive and the power of the President and all of that, so, you know, it depends on where you're coming. I would have one view and others would probably have another view.

But, you know, the other side of it was I suppose when I look back on it, and that's from the technical side of things, the management side or my professional side of the organisation, but you know, behind the professional side, there was a personal life that one developed in the University and that was quite interesting as well. It's quite interesting to see how that has changed over the past number of years. You know, when I came in 1987, it would have been, you know, there was a fantastic social buzz around the place. For instance, in '87, the Stables opened in '87, and Friday night in the Stables was a social event that you didn't miss. Now of course with things like drink driving and various other things, and all sorts of things like introduction of policies and harassment and all sorts of things, some of the shannanigans ... the evenings that we might have had in the Stables would probably, certainly be prosecuted at this stage!. But anyway! we had, but the other thing I think the University might be now, as we are half way through the year of Culture, and Limerick as a national ... It's interesting to look back and see the impact that the University had on the cultural life of the city of Limerick. And it's very funny – I'm just back from a few days visiting Sligo,

where I saw the Vogler quartet are going to head up the Sligo classical festival, this weekend, the May weekend. And I remember John Ruddock, who was the Headmaster, I think was the official title he had at Villiers College, and John bringing groups like the Vogler quartet, forty years ago to Limerick. Bringing on a huge number of these eastern European, young Eastern European musicians, with no money. I mean, Ed used give them the hall, so to speak, for the concerts, and we might sponsor the odd concert if some of the administrative people didn't find out about it, but apart from that, John, John Ruddock that is, and the Association, the Limerick Music Association, with the University of Limerick was a fantastic relationship and the amount of people that we have seen going through the end of May Concert series was an absolute fantastic ... the evenings that we had, in the Jean Monnet as it was then. It was long before we had our, now magnificent Concert Hall, we had the finest of musicians coming and it was just amazing the impact that that had on the city as such, and it brought people to the University as well who would normally not have come.

And so it generated, albeit on a very free basis, it wasn't structured which I think helped, the whole concept of 'town and gown'. Now we didn't have any big committees to develop this thing, but it happened because of cultural initiatives. Obviously, you also had the Hunt Museum, being funded and being founded here at the University. In addition to the impact of people like John Ruddock, and indeed Ed Walsh, in his own personality, the impact that Paddy Doran, as the Dean of Humanities, had on all of this was absolutely fantastic. His impact on the things such as the Self Portrait Collection and the various other art initiatives, including the original Hunt museum here. Paddy was a fabulous character, he was just, he had an infectious laugh also, and when Paddy laughed everybody laughed. Now, you know, Paddy wasn't a manager either so when it came to managing things, including the college, maybe he wasn't the best, but he was a great man to do things. And he was just one of those people that sticks out in my memory, and you know he's passed away, and I regret the fact that the University never really had a memorial service or anything to honour Paddy.

But, and that was the, that was one of the abiding things, was the development of the cultural and the personal side of things. And of course some things that can't be written into either the oral history, that's a bit of an oxymoron, isn't it?, but, or spoken about, is the kind of, the social scene that developed and the liaisons that developed and all sorts of very funny stories that we all know about but none of us will ever put pen to paper to recount them for fear of the courts, but maybe in twenty years time, we might get another opportunity to do this. With a few people dead, we might be able to repeat some of them! But it was a very homely atmosphere, and it was also very welcoming in the sense of families of the staff working here. You know, it wasn't just the, so it was a great way of developing friendships and relationships.

So as I said, that would probably be, maybe sum up the side of, the first part of my career at the university in HR, Personnel, whatever you want to call it. I'm quite certain that when I stop talking, I'll probably go back and say something, maybe at some stage we'll come back to that. So if it's ok at this stage, it probably is, I'm looking at the time, we said we'd spend an hour, but we're clicking over that at this stage ...

So then we come to the ... issue of Lifelong Learning. And this in a way is also a fantastic part of the history of the University. And it's a part of the history of the University that is actually swept under the carpet very quickly because of the way it ended. And in some ways I'm using the word ended and this would be ... In actual fact, the University were national leaders in the area of Lifelong Learning. At that time it wasn't called Lifelong Learning of course, it was called all sorts of other things, Adult Education, Continuing Education, and all that sort of thing. But we had an organisation here on the campus when I arrived and I honestly can't remember when it was actually established. It was called the Regional Management Centre and again this was an idea that Ed had about having something in the region for Regional Managers so that they didn't all have to be migrating to Sandyford to the IMI. So we set up this, and I'm using 'we' here very royally, of course. It was well established by the time I came, under the leadership of a guy by the name of Paul Lynam. Like, in a way that, that area of

the Regional Management Centre became ... eventually went through a few names and it ended up as PMTC, Plassey Management and Technology Centre. And that little unit itself, probably merits, I think, in its own right a fair bit of examination as to how it developed and the impact it has had ... because it had a huge impact in the development of the region economically; it had a fantastic role in the development of a whole series of evening programmes that were delivered by faculty. And it was a fantastic success story.

Unfortunately, you know, like all organisations it went through a growth period, maybe we took our eye off the ball and unfortunately it ended up being put into liquidation. It was a private company, you know, back then I suppose we weren't as sophisticated as we are now with our company structure like with Plassey Campus Centre and the Arena and all of those sort of companies. We weren't as sophisticated and unfortunately we left the PMTC go. Now, to be honest with you there are various figures bandied about, that we closed PMTC for the sake of 75000 euro, that we closed PMTC for the sake of a quarter of a million, and in actual fact, the money doesn't really matter ... the fact is we closed it and we lost out nationally, we lost out regionally, we lost out locally ... you know, and I think maybe we could have done it better, I'm not sure ... and one way or the other we were back to square one, and probably even further back, we were probably minus ten rather than square one, because the sour taste that the demise of PMTC had left in the region you know, it cant be understated that it did leave a sour taste. There were people, you know, people supplying them, hotels and stationery companies, and yeah they were burned. It did leave a sour taste and no, you can't get away from that. That said, we also lost out because we were, we had a period of time when we really were not servicing our client base in terms of offering them short management courses, evening programmes, and a whole series of other things. Now again, as I said, the PMTC, you know, I could spend an awful lot of time talking about that and I think it probably would merit something greater, a study of, you know, because it did, you know, it did lose the run of itself, it started offering programmes that were accredited by other universities, there was all sorts of stuff that really shouldn't have happened that did happen, but nonetheless it was a success. Now, there was always a sense of

jealousy about the PMTC because of course, the Managing Director Paul Lynam, that I mentioned earlier, rather enjoyed driving around in large BMWs, that didn't help.

But it was a fantastic part of the university and it's ... you know, I was Director of Lifelong Learning from 2000 to 2010 and I'd be the first one to say that, you know, we still probably haven't recovered all of the ground that we had lost since PMTC, but I'm sure that we will come around. Now obviously you know, the science of the vacuum is obviously well noted and well known and when the vacuum was created by the demise of PMTC, you know, it was filled. And it was filled by different ways. And you had all sorts of things, so the Faculty of Business set up their own thing, you know and there was various other little units around and I think we're still suffering a bit from that because we still haven't a 'joined up approach' using that awful phrase, to the development of much, you see, I suppose in a way ... PMTC was ... as it said, you know, Management and Technology Centre, so it was about management training, it was about technology training. But the, you know, the other sort of things that we should have been doing then, you know, we were offering evening programmes in Business Studies, we were offering evening programmes in this, but we never got hold of the other market, the market of the Humanities and the Social Sciences to the same extent that for instance that UCC did and does, and is still doing with probably some of the other Universities and we've missed that boat, you know, and you still see Cork, when I say Cork, I mean UCC, having, you know, some of their part programmes based in Limerick and you're kind of saying how can this be, why is it, you know?

Again, I have to say and I know this is an oral history project and this is not 'plámás' or anything like that, but I have to say that the history faculty were probably one of the groups that really grappled with that and brought on programmes like the programmes in local history and various other programmes that they produced. I think, again, it ... really worked and I've seen some of the stuff that has come out of that, because I know people who did it, and I've read their thesis. Down, you know, my next door neighbour did one on the history of

the local creamery. And this is something that we missed. Now, we're getting it I suppose, you know, So in that, I think as I said, PMTC was a fantastic initiative, but I think we did miss out on some of those stuff and are probably still missing out because I think I was, I think I was coming up to almost retiring from the position of Director of Lifelong Learning when we started to think about having flexible delivery and blended learning options for the BA in Humanities and all of that. And, you know, I still think that there is a huge amount of opportunity for us to do that but as this is a history project I suppose I shouldn't be looking at the future but I should be looking at the past.

And ... in actual fact I suppose I had to re-invent myself as well as try and re-invent the University. As I said at the very outset, I wouldn't have been to University, all of my education was part time, you know, a part time degree, part time Masters in Labour Law, all of that kind of stuff. All of that came while I was still working and raising a family and doing all that thing. So I suppose the one thing that I brought to the function of Lifelong Learning was a passion, a passion for it ... and a passion for it as a discipline. But the big issue that I had to grapple with was the fact that it had become totally diffused and the Business had set up their ... they had their own unit there, they had other things. But I think I managed to, because of my links with Business anyway, we were able to come to an accommodation about things. I also tried to re-establish the whole concept of extra mural studies. And again that's an area that, you know, we were reasonably successful but I think you have to work hard at it and I think the University has to accept that this is a contribution to community; that it's not going to make money out of this. Unfortunately the bottom line seems to be dictated by that and now the extra mural studies programme has gone completely from what I can see. So I would be disappointed about that.

But, as I said, in addition to developing, again, initiatives that I would look back and say, you know, I recall for instance, one of the biggest success programmes, or stories that we have had around Lifelong Learning and that has been recently renewed, is the relationship that we have with the Revenue Commissioners. And



people look back and say how did that happen ? Well I can tell you how it happened. It happened very simply because I got a phone call one time from the Revenue Commissioners, saying that they were looking for a six week programme in Corporate Law, and would we be interested in doing it?. And I said yes we would. And I met Henry Ellis who was Prof. of Law at the time and I said this is an opportunity, not mainstream business, but look it's an interesting one that might be worth doing. So Henry and myself met with somebody from the Revenue Commissioners, drew up the six week programme and that was it. And they were fantastically happy with the way we dealt with them.

And then I got a phone call, again, a few weeks later, saying would I meet the Head of Training, outside Ballina in Goosers and we had a lovely meal and a few drinks, and he put it to me that look, there was a tender coming up and I can't say anything about the tender, but there is a tender coming up and we would really like if the university would tender for it. At that stage I then met with Donal Dineen and I said 'listen Donal, this is a big opportunity'. I have to say Donal didn't grasp it, to be honest with you initially, but he then said look, Marjorie Quigley might be a good person to talk to. I spoke with Marjorie and we went off up to Dublin and we met the Head of Revenue Commissioners Training and then a few more people in Revenue Commissioners and again they were basically saying 'look, there's a tender process here now, and you'll have to go through the tender process, etc'. And we did and we won it, and we've been doing it and we've put through hundreds of people and it's a fantastic money spinner for the thing. But it's more than a money spinner because I think it's more about the education also. I think as we have seen, you know, in recent times and the hammering that's going on about the regulation of the country, I think the one thing that we can say about our Revenue people is that they are a fantastically qualified group of individuals. We mightn't like them when we get the bills! but they do and I think that whole programme shows how you can have the partnership arrangements and I'd like to see more of them and I've tried to develop a lot more. We worked with the prison service for a long time, we worked with the army for a long time and we just never managed to click them.

But, you know, I reinvented myself also and I became very much involved with European development and became very much involved with other issues around Lifelong Learning for instance the qualifications framework, and I was, I took part in a number of the national developments in the Qualifications Framework in Ireland. Now again that's probably just my own side of it rather than just the history of UL, but I, what it has done in terms of UL, is that UL is seen in Europe as a university that's committed to the concept of Lifelong Learning and specialist streams within Lifelong Learning itself. For example, a recognition of prior learning is one area where we certainly have a reputation and some of that reputation is probably based on work that I did myself. But I think it will develop now that I've gone, in other areas.

So areas like that for instance, I think ... in the twelve years that I was Head of Lifelong Learning ... UL signed fifteen or sixteen EU contracts with fifteen EU funded projects through Lifelong Learning, in the twelve years. And again, that led to significant developments like international conferences. We hosted two large international conferences on Lifelong Learning here, we had the European Continuing Education Network conference here and we had various other ones.

So I think the history of Lifelong Learning, or my history of Lifelong Learning, the ten years that I've been here is far less colourful than the HR side of it or the Personnel side of it. But I think what has happened in the last ten years or twelve years is that we have re found what we had in the PMTC to a certain extent. I don't think we have cracked it fully, and I think we still have a way to go, but I think under, I think Anne Ledwith who has just been appointed as the Director of Continuing and Professional Education, a title I don't agree with, because Education is too narrow for what really we should be doing, but that's not for me now!. I have to realise that my hat is off and I don't have an input in these things any more!.

But I think, you know, the way it has developed has been phenomenal. And when I look back, and I will finish at this stage, I look back on my time in UL and I have great stories at this stage, which you can tell over a pint and I've just spent three

or four days with some colleagues of mine from the University playing golf in Sligo, and some of the stories that we can still tell, you know, some of them in time we will be able to tell, some of them we won't! Directors of IT throwing phones out of windows and various other sort of things, I mean we just act as if, it was just a wonderful time. And it's a time that it's very difficult to repeat because you're in an organisation that's in a phase of growth and development. I mean, it's funny when I look back on it and I just see that we had about, I think it was ... I remember doing HEA returns with John O' Connor and I think we were returning about maybe seven or 800 staff members, and we had six people working in Personnel. I think there's now 28 people working in HR, you know, and I think a lot of things have happened which are fantastic. You know the development of the function and the emphasis on having specific people in, like, Training and Development and Faculty development and looking at the whole issue. And I think we ... I mean, you know, you could look back and say 'if you ran it with six people then, how come you can't run it with ten or eleven?'. I think HR and Personnel is far more sophisticated and I think it has to be. So, as I said, some of it I would dearly love to be able to recount in a way ... but maybe I don't know, you see, because it's like everything else, a funny story to me is not always a funny story to you and there is always, there are other people on the side of the fun, and what was funny at the time may not be funny now.

And you know, ... I think we have been a wonderful organisation, I think we have worked fantastically well and I think we've, you know, we've been very lucky also, one thing I was only commenting at a tragic situation recently, when we had a member of faculty dying, you know, when poor Christy Gillick passed away, I remember being in NUIG very early on in my time in Lifelong Learning and trying to get the flexible learning programme that we have with NUIG off the ground and Christy was a fantastic contributor to that, so the passing of Christy Gillick. But it brought home to me also that we've been very lucky as an organization. We actually hadn't that many, you know, tragic deaths within the organisation, from a staff perspective. We've obviously had tremendous tragedy from the students perspective.

And I suppose that was the other thing, I suppose, that I didn't touch on it, it might be the subject for another session because I don't want to be delaying the whole thing for you, but the one thing that I think also has to be characterised particularly, and even today, I'll say particularly in the early days, but I think it's still there, and that is the fantastic connectivity there is between the staff of the university and the student body. I think that is something that I have travelled right across Europe and I've worked in the States and you know, I don't see anywhere else this fantastic connectivity. Particularly working in the sporting arena where huge numbers of staff give time, energy, and in a lot of cases money to developing student initiatives. And I'm saying on the sporting side, but they're equally on the other side as well, on the cultural side and some of the other student organisations that we have, you know, and I think the ... when I look back on it now, I look and see how we are developing, the big initiatives that I see that will continue that role and that fantastic connectivity was this whole PVA, the President's Volunteer Award and the contribution that's making to developing the community contribution and I think, I'm delighted to see that that's at the level that it is and that it's billed very high on the Presidents agenda. I think when we look back on it in a few years time, that whole concept of engagement with the wider community is something that we really have to look at it, we're doing quite well, we've had the first two missions, we've had the mission of teaching, we've had the mission of research, but the third mission of community engagement is a job in progress.

And I think that that's something that we will look back on and again I said, it's interesting, we celebrated this year, 2014, we're now celebrating twenty five years of the University. And it was twenty five years ago that we won the very first Fitzgibbon Cup, and ... looking back at the photographs of that, you know, to see some of the people who are actually some of the staff, and some of the faculty are still involved twenty five years on, still trying to win more cups and more trophies and so on. Its much easier nowadays, I mean, in the old days when we had a trimester system for instance, what we used to do to get ... you see you had some faculty who were great and they understood sport and they were willing to contribute and willing to do things. Others had no interest in sport so when we

were saying 'look there's a semi final of the Fitzgibbon Cup, we need to get a student off this Wednesday', 'no!'. The sort of things we used to do, you know, 'i' grades and all sorts of things, you know, some of them, better not be saying too much about them!

But you know, and I think I was, I think the ... we had, its interesting, we had a twenty five year reunion of that team who won that first cup in 89, and to look at how that group of students have developed and they were from all the faculties, different faculties. And it was fabulous to sit down and have a chat with them and see where their lives have gone and how successful they've become and to see that, you know, the University, we probably don't blow our trumpet enough on that, and I think you know, open days are grand, but if students just met these people and heard their life story, and it's only a short life story, they're only out twenty five years and we have ,you know, two or three Chief Executives, you know, very senior people in the public service and they were just great. I look back on my twenty five years in the university and say you know, it was fantastic and I really enjoyed it and I'm still enjoying it, even though I have retired and I'm still fiddling around. So maybe if you want to stop at that and maybe there are things that, you might say 'look maybe you could come back on one or two things', and maybe I can review it myself and say well I should have said a few things more about x, y or z, and so on.

I.: Thanks very much Dermot.