

Interviewee: Christine Hallett, Professor, Principal Emerita, D Univ
UoS Dates: 1989 - 2010
Role(s): 1989 – 1995 Reader in Social Policy; 1994 - 1998 HoD Applied Social Science; 1999 – 2003 Deputy and Senior Deputy Principal; 2004 – 2010 Principal and Vice-Chancellor.



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

Start 00:13 – Stirling advertised post in 1988/89 for a Senior Lecturer in social policy. She was in the University of Leicester. At the time there were savage cuts in university posts; not many senior jobs being advertised.

01:25 – First impressions: struck by the stunning beauty of the Stirling campus at all seasons and working in such a beautiful, clean place.

02:21 – Struck also by locality: how monocultural it was compared to Leicester and how polite, friendly – and slow people were. Different pace of life in Scotland.

03:00 – Struck too by commitment of colleagues to teaching and to students but they were less committed to research.

04:48 – People had ownership of the university; linked with that was a strong sense of stability. People stayed, didn't move on. Sensed that some needed to move and for there to be a greater turnover of academic staff.

06:09 – Appointed to Readership in social policy – wonderful job.

06:21 – Just before taking up post, had been awarded big grant by Dept. of Health for research project studying child protection services in England.

06:42 – Contacted Stirling and negotiated plan whereby some of the grant could be used to buy herself out of 3/5ths of her teaching responsibilities and colleague was appointed for this.

08:20 – Academic work – trying to do high quality empirical research which would make a difference for children and young people. In the teaching – she wanted to engage with students. Enjoyed it but could be quite daunting. Wanted to teach students that social policy was not boring but made a difference to people's lives.

10:27 – Social policy was at the time quite a small part of Sociology in Stirling. Describes Department then. She led the social policy section plus her research. Later became reluctant Head of Dept.- role was to maximize all sections of the Dept. Quite tricky but enjoyed it.

12:45 – c1994 – 98: one of highlights: periodic research assessment exercise in which Stirling and London were rated five stars; huge pride in this.

13:54 – Staff relationships quite good. Didn't find much hostility from students. When became Principal was privileged

<p>to work closely with Student Presidents and the Students' Association who were committed to making things work as well as they could.</p>
<p>15:53 – Significant figures in her working life at Stirling were: Prof. Forty, the Principal who appointed her. Describes how she had to interrupt a sailing course in Poole to fly to Stirling for interview. Unknown to her Prof. Forty was also a sailor. Friends teased her that that was how she got the post; Prof. Cheetham who established the Social Work Research Centre, Prof. Mike Jackson, Senior Deputy Principal, who secured ESRC funding, an extraordinarily creative and effective colleague and possibly the most influential person in her time at Stirling. He shaped the university in various ways, including its contribution to sport.</p>
<p>19:11 – Questioned about governance of the university. Asked by the then Principal, Prof. Andrew Miller, to cover a sabbatical as Deputy Principal for Research. Pleased to undertake this role for six months, which took her into new (for her) management areas of work. Then post became hers. When Prof. Jackson became unwell, and later died, she was invited to undertake his work in Planning and Budgeting – challenging!</p>
<p>22:03 – Questioned about how she came to be Principal: was Senior Deputy Principal when the then Principal Prof. Colin Bell died very suddenly at his desk, and so had to become Acting Principal for almost a year – deeply challenging time. Incredibly supportive colleagues in that traumatic time.</p>
<p>24:06 – Post of Principal advertised and colleagues suggested she apply. University contacts outside Stirling were consulted in customary way about the appointment. Surprised to be appointed; hadn't expected to stay at Stirling so long. Probably part of reason for this was that she had been able to change jobs several times in the one place; wouldn't have wanted to do the same job for 21 years. Stirling had offered her different challenges without her having to move.</p>
<p>28:40 – Describes <i>the Herald</i> headline on her appointment and interview with reporter who was more interested in the new Principal being a woman rather than in her academic career. Academia isn't as hostile an environment to women as some other places but there's still a gender pay gap in most higher education institutions. In some disciplines women aren't promoted as fast as they should be. That may be changing as younger women are more self-confident and assertive.</p>
<p>31:53 – Asked about how she was supported in taking up her new role: went on an intensive training course in various sections over a year. Fantastic group of supportive peers on this; kept up with them after course was completed. Also had some helpful mentoring from two senior academics.</p>
<p>33:33 – Aims in taking up post were to make Stirling more international - to attract more overseas students – good for student body to be more diverse – good for their countries, too. Subsequently hearing their stories at alumni reunions and the like and their high esteem for the university – including the care and cherishing many had received from the porters, as well as the academic staff – was good.</p>
<p>36:27 – More challenging was the need to raise the university's game in research. Struck by its commitment to teaching. Thinks successor has achieved an improvement in the research area.</p>
<p>38:18 – Any Principal has to ensure that the books balance and that students continue to be attracted to the university. Met all new staff and reminded them that their work was about teaching (and helping students who were central to the university's existence) AND about research. Thinks Stirling did have real commitment to students.</p>
<p>39:53 – Worked most closely with Deputy Principals, University Secretary, Finance Officer and Estates and Buildings Officer, plus the whole senior team and secretarial staff of her office. Worked closely also with the governing body – the Court. Chairs in her time were Dr. Doris Littlejohn and Dr. Alan Simpson. The Principal was ultimately accountable to the Court, as well as colleagues and students and to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. (Now does work for the NHS and is struck by how tightly controlled that is compared with the universities in Scotland.) There is a degree of autonomy which is necessary to get the job done.</p>
<p>44:40 – Felt privileged to live in the Principal's house on campus – wonderful site. Modern, interesting house which has recently been listed.</p>
<p>46:23 – Too much focused on the university to have much time for a life outside of her work – it was intensive. Thinks people were surprised when she decided to retire after 7 years but wanted to leave when people were sorry she was going rather than staying too long. Time to let someone else have a go. Friends were drawn from the university and beyond. Family very important – kept her feet on the ground!</p>
<p>49:48 – Thinks relationships between the university and the city improved. Prof. Colin Bell had been instrumental in trying to bring about a closer relationship between them and she thinks the city responded. Felt the university was more global in its focus whereas the city was primarily focused on the well-being of the population – not easy to marry these two aspects.</p>
<p>52:30 – Was she ever frustrated? Yes: by inability to see performance in research matched by excellence in teaching.</p>

Occasionally frustrated by conservatism of the University of Stirling, e.g. the way students were registered at the start of every semester (describes) and the difficulty of getting things changed. But working in such a beautiful place with commitment to learning and colleagues to lead it and support her – all made her feel it was such a privilege.

56:22 – Would she have done anything differently? Yes – all sorts of things but doesn't look back and think that anything had been a dreadful mistake. Had opportunity to introduce new subjects like Law to the curriculum. Doesn't regret the development of sport – worked hard at that – sports scholarships helpful – sad about sports research performance.

58:30 – Was proud of winning *The Sunday Times* 'Scottish University of the year', a rise in rankings, new academic developments like Law and managing to "run a pretty happy ship". Left feeling humbled by the positive things people said about her Principalship

59:59 – Privileged to work with various Chancellors especially Diana Rigg and James Naughtie both of whom were valued colleagues from whom she had learned much.

Ends 60:50

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