

Interviewee: Jim Doran  
UoS Dates: 1979 – 1984, BA (Politics)  
Role(s): Undergraduate; Vice President of Students' Union 1981 - 82



## Interview summary:

**Start 0:00** – he arrived in Stirling in September 1979, just six weeks after his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. He grew up in Glasgow, and was the first in his family to go to University. His teachers encouraged kids to go and he was always top of his class; however, he didn't know what university was and imagined it as a school after school

**02:00** – at 17, it was difficult to go to a university outside of Scotland (because he wasn't 18), so he applied to Stirling, Glasgow and Strathclyde. The other ten pupils from his class who decided to study went to Glasgow. He broke free for two reasons: first, he wanted to go somewhere else; and, second, he visited the campus and fell in love with the place, even though he didn't know "what they did inside". When he arrived, he got a prospectus with a colour cover that showed the campus and he poured over it, and when he got the student information book that had exactly the same aerial view, it brought back the memories of the visit and he really wanted to go to Stirling and was "over the moon" when he got the necessary grades

**05:00** – initially he wanted to study accountancy, just because this was his best school subject

**05:38** – he didn't really mix with the students in accountancy classes, because he started to get involved in the Students' Union, and found all the other subjects much more interesting - like politics and sociology. The good thing about Stirling was that it allowed a mix; he had already mixed accountancy with English and history, but he still fancied other subjects

**06:45** – he had a full grant and wanted to move away from accountancy, but there was a problem because he couldn't get a degree in the time allocated. However, with the help of the university, he applied to the Scottish Education Department to be able to repeat first year, and was allowed to do so with a full grant. The university was very supportive - he thinks because he was so young, and it was clearly just a wrong first choice of subject - and so, he could move over to politics

**08:10** – when he arrived in the first semester, the President of the Students' Union had resigned over the summer, and so there were new elections in October and Jack McConnell was standing in the by-election; Jack, who was standing, was canvassing and they got chatting. JD didn't even know about the Students' Union and got quite excited to learn that he had a vote. He voted for Jack, and they stayed in touch and even though Jack didn't get elected, he encouraged JD to stand as a first-year representative. JD stood and wrote a manifesto – which he found quite scary, because he had not grown up in a family which was politically aware.

<b>11:40</b> – the mix of people in Stirling was special. His first act while standing was to read in the university calendar the constitution of the Students’ Union, because he wanted to see what it was all about. He got quite interested in the constitutional elements (who represented whom etc.). That was his introduction to the Students’ Union.
<b>15:30</b> – the first meeting took him aback, as it was so political and “hard fought”, but then he became involved. A lot of his political education came from that, with meetings in the “Grange” [Allangrange]. There were “old timers”, who had been there since 1975, and he talked with them; he got to know the protest songs, and felt a political awakening, while “it probably helped that Thatcher was elected”
<b>18:45</b> – in his first year he was appointed to deal with accommodation issues which were important even then; Jack got elected by the end of JD’s first year along with Mairi Sutherland and there was a campaign, as there had been a surge of students needing places. As a result, the chalets were provided [at Pendreich Way]. He remembers June Brookfield whom he thought a lovely woman. The Accommodation Office made a lot of effort to find places for the students and eventually they negotiated with the local Council and got properties in the Raploch – and when he was Vice President, he actually lived there, which he found quite scary, as there were tensions with locals at that time.
<b>24:59</b> – afterwards he became Vice President; he had to canvass, but at that time he already knew people and had developed a network; the foyer of the Macrobert theatre was basically the networking space (you had to cross it to reach the café and restaurant)
<b>26:18</b> – as part of campaigns, there was always a microphone down in the Macrobert, and the students in the audience were urged to give their backing. He found addressing meetings frightening as there was heckling, but also good training
<b>27:10</b> – the general meetings were fascinating to him, because any student could just “pop along and vote”. Sometimes there were so many people they could hardly fit in the room; there seemed to be passion, and people wanted to change things
<b>27:58</b> – one great issue was the cuts, announced while he was Vice President. There was 44% reduction [Ed. note: c 28% govt funding], “something ridiculous”. A campaign took over, with meetings and the UGC [University Grants Committee] arriving, and it was in general a very political and active time. They tried to work together with academic staff; the view of not only students, but also many academic staff was that the universities could not just capitulate - they had to do something (not just in Stirling but also on a national level)
<b>30:54</b> – he doesn’t remember specifics, but he felt that the students stopped or alleviated the effect of cuts in particularly vulnerable areas.
<b>32:32</b> – The Students’ Union was focused more internally, but Stirling University gained a good reputation when Jack was elected as President, with Mairi as Vice President. Stirling University played its role within the National Union of Students (NUS); JD himself became involved within the NUS Glasgow area and part of its committee, and he and Jack were elected to the Scottish Executive. They were very involved and helped shape NUS Scotland. His union work at Stirling was focused internally, for instance on welfare issues. However, he ended up being the national secretary of the NUS (UK); when he graduated he moved to London to take up his sabbatical appointment.
<b>34:40</b> – Stirling was a very political place and basically gave him his political education. When he finished his two terms in the NUS, he worked in trade unions - a direct result of Jack convincing him as a 17-year-old boy to vote for him.
<b>Ends 36:56</b>

<b>Interview No:</b>	SURSA OH / 95	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SURSA</b> University of Stirling Stirling FK9 4LA</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="mailto:info@sursa.org.uk">info@sursa.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.sursa.org.uk">www.sursa.org.uk</a></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>SURSA</b> Oral History</p>
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