



Interviewee: Pam Courcha (previously Gallagher)
UoS Dates: 1980 to 1983
Role(s): Director of Housing Studies



Interview summary:

Summary of content; with time (min:secs)

Start 00 Was at Hammersmith and West London College teaching the Institute of Housing programme in 70s then did a Masters. Then moved to Trent Polytechnic (not good), after 6 months the Stirling job came up. Only been to Scotland twice before. Interview on a sunny day, walked to the castle afterwards and thought that this is the sort of place for a holiday, not work.

4.15 Huge life change for self and daughter. Course hadn't existed before. Dave Wilson had got plans for course moving, reflecting well established social work course with placements. University approvals were in place, Falkirk College had been identified to provide Building Technology teaching. Probably tweaked a bit but pattern of teaching really appealed – academic teaching balanced with practical placements. Very excited.

7.37 Arrived and moved straight into selecting students for course.

8.00 Institute of Housing validated the course. Followed the requirements closely with some additional features. No other postgraduate courses in the UK at that time.

10.22 8 students initially, studying for 2 years. None funded by employers, most straight from undergraduate courses. Asked about response of employers to requests for placements – SSHA and housing associations very accommodating, local authorities a bit more challenging. Students had a non-housing placement in planning, welfare or many other things – great opportunity to get a different perspective on housing. Lot of organising of placements.

13.25 First impressions – previous environment at Brunel was a concrete jungle; Stirling by contrast was breath-taking. Overwhelming and felt right. Dave Wilson did a lot to help settle in, provide contacts, understanding how university worked and in personal life. Chris Turner in Social Work also supportive. Finding somewhere to live and helping daughter adjust – Dave and wife very supportive. Lots to cope with.

19.36 Passionately committed to housing training. Father was a builder, put her in touch with the Director of the Institute of Housing who arranged for her to accompany a housing officer on visits round some London housing estates. Doing housing management – she thought “this is for me”. Got a trainee position at Finchley Borough Council, studied part-time and worked through the roles. Made her totally committed to that way of approaching learning. Understood how poor training was and how important. About people and homes. Had been a homeless single person at one point herself. That's why Stirling was such a good fit.

23.30 Agitator for training – recalls challenging Michael Heseltine at the Institute’s Aviemore Conference. About right, trained staff and support for staff – that’s what it should be about.
24.45 Did you feel integrated into the rest of the Department/University? No – never felt part of the university. Stand-alone unit, part of a school. Strange position. Main contacts outwith the university, in the housing world. Sent students out to a technical college and on placements – not like other courses. University didn’t appear to take an interest. Good connections in the housing world. Eventually got another member of staff – Nigel Armstrong – that helped with organising placements etc. as well as having a colleague.
28.30 Stayed until 1983. Saw one cohort right through. Nobody came to say goodbye the day she left. A lonely goodbye which confirmed why she left. Job came up at Tenant Participation Advisory Service – lower salary and status – didn’t stay long. Then job came up at Institute of Housing Scottish Training Unit – perfect. At the university those involved worked well together but odd situation beyond the Unit. Didn’t see herself as an academic – situation seemed to underline ideas. Needed to be out there – doing.
33.00 Relationship with students – placements involved meetings and assessment. Got to know them very well. Hope/expectation was that students would move into housing, make a difference as managers. Some did become senior managers – compassionate managers who understand the job at the front line. Less bureaucratic. Had to learn a bit about Scots – what is a “lum”?
37.28 Still a new university in 1980. Lovely to be in this new, light building. Legacy of Queen’s visit was often cast up (didn’t know anything about this beforehand) – in the outside world. Seen as a radical place to study – some people in local government saw this. The fact that students went to Falkirk College for Building Technology was a bit of a redeeming feature – seen as more grounded because of that. Being a new university made them more open to innovative ideas – this course was very different but went through all the approvals, even if they lost interest afterwards. Very much needed an admin person to deal with the placement organisation (before emails etc.!) – no issues about appointment.
42.40 Where was the satisfaction? People in outside world came to value placements – selected the right students, clear criteria for placements, well managed. Students really valued placements. Paperclip story – outlines the importance of placements and learning.
45.30 Anything you wish you had done differently? No real blips; did OK. People emerged with a postgraduate Diploma – sent a message to the world. What do you think it achieved after you had left? Kept up with the times, became very established, good reputation, good work done. Left a launch pad for what was to come. Great place, great course. Disappointment in university colleagues but a great experience. Provided confidence to write articles and to move on in the future. Subsequently did a research Masters degree, using training as the basis of action research.
[Ends 53.12]

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