

## **CSAP Report: UK14/C/09**

### **Criminology in the professions: Turning Academic Benchmarks into Employability skills.**

**Keywords:** Employability, Subject Benchmarks, Skills.

**Subject:** Criminology

#### **Summary:**

This report reflects on a case study example of teaching a dedicated employability module in an undergraduate criminology curriculum. The report uses various sets of data collected from students, criminology alumni, a sample of employers and university academic and support staff, to reflect on pertinent issues relating to graduate employability. Findings suggest that understanding the links between critical academic theory, technical knowledge and generic skills, are empowering both for staff and students, and such a framework represents a creative way of addressing the QAA criminology employability benchmarks. Whilst staff are unable to change the national context relating to graduate employability, understanding the pertinent issues and contradictions within the area helps in counteracting potential 'bad news' and also enables students to be more aware of what they need, beyond their degree, to be successful in gaining appropriate employment. Apart from the research detailed below, outcomes include a DVD entitled 'Life after Criminology' which features contributions from criminology alumni, academic and careers staff and students, and also a Mahara portfolio including materials used for a criminology information day held in July 2010.

#### **Context:**

It is well documented that the possession of degree has not only been related to economic prosperity more generally, but is also advantageous on an individual level. More currently, in the context of more people accessing higher education than ever before, and an increasingly dynamic and competitive graduate employment marketplace, the general view is that having a degree is not enough on its own to ensure graduate level employment (CBI Report 2009). Tomlinson (2008) argues that in context of increasing fees and the current economic climate, students (and their parents) are increasingly shopping around for courses, seeing employability as a core criteria. In a survey by the NUS (2009) on applicants throughout the sector, 66% of the participants were concerned about graduate employment levels although the majority (64%) thought it should be up to the government rather than universities to do more to ensure that graduates are able to get jobs after graduation.

In a time where the future is invariably going to include wideranging cuts in government funding it is significant that employability outcomes have been specifically linked with funding provision both in the former Labour government's HE framework entitled 'Higher Ambitions' (November 2009) and in a recent speech from the new coalition Minister of State for Universities and Science David Willetts (2010). In his statement to Parliament introducing the framework, the former Labour Business, Universities and Skills Secretary Lord Mandelson stated that the

government 'will identify where the supply of graduates is not meeting demand for key skills' and that HEFCE would be asked to 'prioritise the courses and subjects which match these skills needs'. And in the same vein David Willetts (2010) is seeking to introduce the idea of UK universities having to publish 'Employability statements' which 'will summarise what universities and colleges offer students to help them become job-ready in the widest sense and support their transition into the world of work'. In the light of the political agenda, Newman (2009) argues that universities will not only have to explain how they can *educate* students in workplace skills but also how they can improve the career *opportunities* of graduates, with this being measured, according to Mandelson (cited op.cit), by looking at previous graduates' success in 'moving on to good occupations'. Yorke (2006 p2) argues however that we need to reject this simplistic definition of employability because in reality:

Employability refers to a graduate's achievements and his/her *potential* to obtain a 'graduate job' and should not be confused with the actual acquisition of a 'graduate job' (Yorke's emphasis).

The difference between making students more employable and improving graduate employment is a problematic one not only due to the problems of defining what 'employability' actually is (see Yorke 2006) but also given the political agenda. Currently, employability in university students is measured by the Destination of Leavers in Higher Education survey (DLHE). This is a survey completed by all UK universities, taken six months after the students have graduated, and measures what type of employment graduates from any particular course have secured<sup>1</sup>. The way that this is measured, particularly in relation to the short timescale after graduation, tends to favour 'vocational type' courses such as medicine, social work and nursing, in comparison to 'academic type' courses, such as those found in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and also benefits universities that have a vibrant post graduate culture, or a more affluent student body. Purcell and Elias (2004) point out that the time that it takes graduates from different disciplinary backgrounds to get a 'graduate job' tends to differ and for some the period of searching may take considerably longer than a few months. Apart from this, issues such as ethnic origin, class, gender (see Pedegogy for Employability Group 2006) as well as local and regional fluctuations in economic buoyancy are superimposed on the national economic position, making employability, a problematic indicator if defined in terms of 'moving on to good occupations'. Moreau and Leathwood (2006) also identify that 'Skills' are not perceived as neutral by employers who read these differently in different applicants depending on things like ethnicity, gender, age, disability and social class. Thus it needs to be recognised that not only does employability come from complex learning and goes beyond 'core' and 'key' skills, and certainly 'does not represent sufficient condition for gaining employment', but also there are many issues that universities simply have no control over.

It is clear given this context that 'employability' is a contentious concept, and that different interest groups are likely to argue about both the meaning and the application of practice in HE. Yorke (2006 p11) argues there are going to be discrepancies not only about what employers would ideally like in terms of a graduate perfectly attuned to their needs and what HE can reasonably supply without compromising academic freedoms or autonomy.

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst there is also a 'longitudinal DLHE', which is looking at graduates over a longer period of time, this only has a relatively small sample across all universities.

## **Activities:**

In the light of the current context around student employability, the main aim of this research is to investigate how those teaching undergraduate criminology degree's might effectively bridge the gap between teaching subject knowledge appropriate for academic criminology, and producing graduates who are ready to enter graduate level employment, through an academic taught module. The study centres on a new single semester 15 cats points criminology module entitled 'Criminology in the Professions' (CIP), running for the first time from January 2010 at the University of Lincoln, which is designed to address the issue of career planning and the acquisition of 'employability' skills, in the curriculum. By evaluating the efficacy of the module and doing some linked research on samples of alumni and employers, university staff and students who have completed an employment placement, the research aims to do the following:

- Examine the adequacy of the QAA benchmarks for criminology;
- Examine ways in which criminology can meet employability benchmarks;
- Consider ways in which we might inform the criminology curriculum in relation to the developing employability agenda;
- Inform careers practitioners;
- Provide information on how criminology departments can better engage with employers.

## **The context of the Criminology in the Professions module:**

*There were four points that informed the approach and development of the CIP module:*

**Point 1:** Anecdotal examples from the university careers professionals identified that many students are poor at recognising the skills that they are learning from their degree study and applying them beyond the academic arena. This means that they are not always as effective as they could be at matching their skills to the competencies asked for by employers, which may affect their ability to obtain employment.

**Point 2:** When considering what to do after graduation, many students are not aware of the breadth of opportunities available to them both within and beyond the criminal justice process. If they want to work within a 'criminology related career', students tend to aim for work for the more obvious criminal justice organisations such as police, prisons or probation. They are also unaware of the different types of work within these organisations. Just over 51% of the students surveyed who were studying on the CIP module wanted to join the police, the probation service or the prison service, with 25% not knowing what they wanted to do. At this moment in time, given the likelihood of significant government funding cuts in the public sector it is particularly important that students are made aware of the different career possibilities and opportunities open to them.

**Point 3:** Research seems to suggest that although employers find that graduates are good at many skills that they need, such as IT and 'problem solving', what is described by employers as 'Business awareness' is often quite poor as students are unaware of what particular jobs actually entail, or what is required of them in the workplace (see CBI Future Fit Survey for data on employer and graduate perceptions

and opinions 2009). This can cause dissatisfaction both amongst graduates whose abilities to secure particular types of employment do not match their expectations, and employers who become disillusioned with the 'quality' of graduates.

**Point 4:** Many students often do not consider career planning until their final year or after they have graduated. This means that they do not make best use of the opportunities available to them at the university that would help them to become more employable such as doing volunteering, going to see practitioner lectures and using the university careers service. Anecdotal comments from careers professionals plus academic staff experience from inviting practitioners to undertake lectures identified that such talks and events were often not particularly well attended. Apart from this, students did not attend sessions where they did not see the immediate relevance of the session to an individual career choice or learning outcome. In other words they if they wanted to be a police officer, they often would not consider going to see a talk by a probation officer or prison officer. The student survey of level 2 criminology students in this study did seem to reinforce this, even though they were in effect over half way through their degree course. Out of 68 students the survey identified that, before studying the module, only 7% had used the 'drop in' service, only 1 person had made use of a full careers interview and only 13% knew where to find the opportunities staff on the campus.

### **Criminology in the Professions (CIP): A dedicated employability module (see appendix 1 for module details).**

The CIP module was designed as a core 15 cats point module delivered at level 2 to B.A. (Hons) Criminology students and BSc (Hons) Criminology and Forensic Investigation students. This year there were 83 students on the course. The aim of this module was to overtly address how the methodological, academic and practical skills gained from degree study can be applied to the student's professional development. The assignment consisted of the production of a professional development file, which included various tasks such as a discourse analysis, seminar preparation and presentation materials, several personal reflections and a CV. Staff also stressed how a research methodology framework could be transferred to career planning, and appropriately focused skills development. It was made very clear to students that they should treat this module as a 'job' particularly in relation to both their attendance and catching up on any work that was unavoidably missed and the direct link between the formal timetabled sessions and the assessment made this link more tangible for the students.

The module worked to develop technical knowledge/information, skills and academic methodology and reflection in the following way:

- *Technical knowledge:* Practitioner Lectures; Alumni evening; lectures/workshops/drop in service by careers staff; contributions from level 3 students who had been on a placement with the benefits agency.
- *Skills acquisition:* Student led seminars on practitioner talks; Individual student presentations on potential 'criminology' careers; CV and personal statement tasks; Use of group work to develop pertinent questions to raise and to support collective learning; Supporting students to become 'independent learners' by encouraging personal reflection by them of their current situation in respect of their skills and knowledge acquisition. This is then developed by getting them to reflect on what other skills/knowledge they will need to get their desired employment, and how they might obtain such skills.

- *Academic reflection*: Employing a discourse analysis as a method to evaluate the practitioner talks; reflecting on issues such as organisational cultures, concepts like managerialism, the use of professional jargon and interagency partnerships and by reflecting on own learning by using concepts such as 'Career Anchors' (Schein 1993) and applying these to their own career planning.

In order to encourage independent learning, the module was specifically designed so that parts of the assignments were developed in the seminars and workshops and students were encouraged to address the tasks as they progressed through the module. Therefore students started tasks in one seminar and then had to present their findings to their colleagues in the next week's seminar, after having completed the task on their own. The module used a mixed teaching strategy which included lectures and seminars led by academic and support staff, IT sessions, seminars led by students, practitioner lectures and an alumni evening. The assessment was closely linked to these formal sessions, to encourage attendance; for example students were required to evaluate the alumni session and contributions from a number of students who undertook a summer placement with the benefit fraud agency. They also had to do a discourse analysis of the practitioner lectures, as well as providing lists of questions for the practitioners and alumni. The Professional Development file also required students to include various seminar preparation materials in their hand in. The attendance provision was added because experience from both academic staff and careers professionals of bringing in practitioners to speak to students, was that the students only attend sessions where they are interested in the specific career, not realising that practitioners often give very useful advice that can be generalised to most 'graduate' jobs.

The students on the module were also formally required to visit the university careers service so that staff could check their CV's and career plans. This was also partly to increase student awareness of the services available to them at the university and to encourage them to make the best use of these given that the alumni data that we collected suggested that just fewer than 30% of the sample had accessed a full careers guidance interview before leaving the university. Students were encouraged to treat the module as they would do a job of work and were told that they would be expected to attend and participate professionally in all sessions. It was made clear that poor attendance and participation could adversely impact upon their final marks in the module. Students were put into informal groups at the beginning of the module and informed, if they missed any sessions, that in the first instance they should use their group members to help them to catch up. This did not preclude the students from obtaining help and information from staff but did try and encourage them to develop their team working skills with colleagues rather than relying on staff. The strategy of linking the assessment directly to the formal teaching sessions, and encouraging the students to complete the assessment tasks as they progressed through the course was broadly successful resulting in attendance being good particularly in lectures, and only one assignment non-submission from the whole cohort of 83.

## **Methodology:**

A mixed methodology approach was employed to address the tasks identified as pertinent to this report and to evaluate the module. These included:

### *A survey of criminology graduates (Alumni):*

Using a database provided by the Alumni department of the university we sent out 250 questionnaires by emails in November 2009 to graduates who had previously studied criminology at the university between when the degree was first offered in 1996 and 2008<sup>2</sup>. The sample was not necessarily representative of all criminology graduates who had studied at the university, but represented those who had joined the alumni association. If anything, looking at their degree results, it was probably skewed towards the higher achievers overall, therefore although some interesting issues were identified, it is important to recognise the limitations of the sample. The purpose of this survey was to find out information about the employment history of alumni, how they now rated their criminology degree and whether they felt that it prepared them well for employment. The purpose was to be able to feed this information back into the curriculum. The questionnaire also asked them about their career planning strategies. Fifty five graduates<sup>3</sup> filled in the questionnaire which contained both open and closed questions. Seven alumni who had been contacted via the survey visited the university to take part in a question and answer evening, and two of the alumni did practitioner lectures on the module. The alumni evening was videoed and was used as a basis for the production of a DVD entitled 'Life after Criminology' which includes contributions from alumni, careers professionals, academic staff and students.

### *Student surveys of those studying the CIP module:*

Two surveys, which required both qualitative and quantitative responses, were completed by the 2009/10 Level 2 cohort of students studying the new 'employability' module Criminology in the Professions. The first was undertaken on the first lecture session of the course in January and the second on the final course lecture, when they had completed all of the course and most of the assessment, in April<sup>4</sup>. The aim was to see how much effect the module had on things like career aspirations and where they would think of going for help with career planning. We also asked them to evaluate the content of the module and consider whether they thought employability should be studied specifically in the curriculum. There were 83 students who studied both single honours criminology and criminology and forensic investigation signed onto the module. The response rate was 82% for the survey before the module and 78% for the survey after the module. Both surveys included open and closed questions.

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<sup>2</sup> We decided not to survey the 2009 graduates as we felt that the time scale between them leaving and receiving the questionnaire was too short and that this might also have interfered with the universities DLHE survey which students automatically receive six months after graduation.

<sup>3</sup> another three got in contact, but did not complete the questionnaire two because their employers forbade them to do so due to their occupations being 'classified' and one who thought that because his work was not 'criminological' enough for us to be interested in his situation.

<sup>4</sup> Whilst it might have been better to have collected the second survey later, either after the students had handed in the assignment or even after they had received feedback, it would have been more difficult to have gained access to the students and thus ensure a reasonable sample of replies.

### *A survey of employers:*

Using 'Survey monkey' to access a sample of general employers known by the university, a survey was sent to 1388 employers generating 67 replies. This was a proportionately small number of replies caused in part by the database not being as up to date as it could have been which resulted in several hundred emails being 'bounced back'. Whilst the sample clearly could not be said to be representative of UK business generally, it did give us some ideas about the sorts of skills and knowledge those employers in the sample valued in the work place, as well as what they knew about criminology as an academic subject. The questionnaire contained both open and closed questions.

### *2 focus groups of students who had done a summer job placement:*

We undertook two focus groups in December 2009 containing a small number of level 3 criminology students who had taken part in a paid work experience placement with the benefit fraud agency over the summer of 2009. One focus group contained two students and the other five students<sup>5</sup>. The aim was to find out about how they felt that the work experience had affected their employability. A number of these placement students got the opportunity to lead a seminar in the Criminology in the Professions module in which they discussed the value of their work experience.

### *A focus group with staff from the careers service:*

University careers staff played a fundamental part in the module in respect of advising both academic staff of what they thought were the fundamental problems the university faced to get students to engage with employability issues, and also in advising students with some of the tasks from their assessment. The five careers staff had direct input into the design of the module, took part in some of the taught sessions, and looked over the student CV's and career plans, so their contribution represented an important reflection on how successful the module was.

### *A world café exercise with thirteen members of academic staff from the School of Social Sciences.*

This world café exercise involved academic staff from criminology, politics, international relations, social policy and social science. It lasted two hours and consisted of a short presentation about the module, and a short explanation about the purpose of a 'world café' exercise. Staff were then asked to discuss the issues over lunch and write any observations they had on the tablecloths. They were also encouraged to change tables and 'cross pollinate' their ideas.

### *A world café exercise with delegates from the careers day July 2010.*

This world café exercise involved a mix of academic and careers staff from various universities, as well as students who had undertaken the module and alumni. It was undertaken during lunch and delegates were asked to consider the issues of pre-entry guidance, employability in the curriculum and graduate careers guidance. The materials and findings from the day can be found by using the following link:

<http://portfolios.lincoln.ac.uk/view/view.php?t=bGZKBvbeHUlh4htLzyKK>

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<sup>5</sup> The reason for the disparity in group size was due to one student being unable to attend the smaller group and also the commitments of the students at the time of the groups.

## **Findings:**

The research aimed to:

1. Examine the adequacy of the QAA benchmarks;
2. Examine ways in which criminology can meet employability benchmarks;
3. Consider ways in which we might inform the criminology curriculum in relation to the developing employability agenda;
4. Better inform careers practitioners;
5. Provide information how criminology departments can better engage with employers.

The following discussion uses the data collected to address these aims:

### **Aim 1: Exploring the adequacy of the QAA benchmarks:**

#### **Context:**

When evaluating the subject benchmarks for criminology, it became apparent that these are written in such a way as to be flexible enough for universities to be creative in addressing the issue of employability. The benchmarks require courses to help students 'to choose a programme appropriate for their personal career plans', enabling 'stakeholders and employers to know what skills can be expected' from a criminology graduate (QAA 2007 2.2), and to make sure that students 'develop a range of skills that will enable them to work autonomously both as students and in subsequent employment' (ibid 5.1). These benchmarks however do state that '...(criminology) must guard against attempts to foreclose this dialogue with the premature creation of theoretical or methodological protocols favouring particular sub-discipline fields, whether endorsed by state officials, by the mass media, or by fashions of academic thought' (QAA 2007 3.3). Thus the benchmarks are written in such a way as to identify pertinent issues relating to both student career aspirations and employer needs, as well as recognising so there is a balance to be had between the maintenance of academic freedom and the creation of 'employment ready' students.

In addressing these benchmarks, there are a number of pertinent issues here, firstly we could ask whether it is useful or appropriate to address student 'employability' in the academic curriculum, beyond the 'transferable' skills that studying a degree provides, or whether this should be left to the university careers professionals. Secondly given the political agenda stressing the importance of 'employability', there are issues regarding the way that this concept is 'officially' defined and measured for dissemination to the general public, that need considering.

*Should employability be taught in the academic curriculum?*<sup>6</sup>

*Views from academic staff:*

In relation to the subject of student employability, Yorke and Knight (2007) note that there is a range of responses from HE sector staff with some being positive, some being indifferent and some treating employability as 'a fad'. This research was

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the research team acknowledges that there are a number of very valid ways of addressing the employability benchmarks both internally and externally to the academic curriculum, and that this project represents an evaluation of putting employability into the curriculum, rather than a critique of other equally valid ways of doing this.

interested to know what the staff team from the School of Social Sciences<sup>7</sup> thought about both the module and the issue of student employability more generally. To this end in April 2010 we did a short presentation that included information about the module, the research and some preliminary results, and after this undertook a 'world café conversation' over lunch. The following are some pertinent comments from this event:

In terms of their perceptions of the module, there were many positive comments:

*"Crim in Profs – a brilliant module – it has focussed so many students on their potential".*

This related to students contacting staff about how they can personally work to achieve a particular level of degree in order to be able to follow the career that they are interested in. Staff generally agreed that the module was useful:

*"Very important to cover careers/employability at university".*

*"Valuable module – using both academic and practical skills – also to relate to a variety of careers".*

Apart from challenging the governments concept of 'employability' there were some concerns both about whether academics should be involved with student employability and also around the fact that in their experiences students tended to perceive 'skills' modules or anything to do with personal development planning (PDP) negatively:

*"This is a reality – but I don't think that academics should be involved with helping students to find work. Having said this – I think that the project is necessary and useful".*

*"Students may say that they want careers etc as part of the curriculum, but when it comes to teaching this they see the module as of 'less value' than 'academic' modules and often don't attend".*

This said, it was also stated that this view from students was sometimes created as a result of academic staff having to teach 'off the peg skills packages' which historically were disliked by both staff and students. Other staff concerns related to things like staff workload, a belief that the student should be more 'independent' in these matters and that academic study could be compromised:

*"All this implies I will be doing more work".*

*"They [the students] should pick up a lot of this anyway".*

*"Question for academics – are we losing valuable time – when students can't work on theory!"*

Whilst these are valid concerns, the staff delivering the CIP module believed that the module represented an opportunity to explore the links and boundaries between skills and theory.

The staff that were involved in this 'conversation' were from a number of disciplines including Social Policy, Politics, International Relations and Social Science apart from Criminology, so they also discussed how it might be possible to bring in skills that would enhance employability in their own disciplines:

*"Can we have off the shelf packages which explain what skills you acquire through certain aspects of their programme ie seminar, group-work, assessment etc?"*

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<sup>7</sup> The Subject of Criminology being located in this school at the University of Lincoln.

They also recognised the instrumental focus of some students to their study:

*“Do students prefer to be made to do things? Sometimes students say they would rather be forced to do ‘extra-curricular’ activities as they know they are good for them but recognise that they often act instrumentally so will opt-out if they aren’t compulsory”.*

*...and that there were many different ways of addressing ‘employability’ at the university:*

*“‘Mainstreaming’ – I think we should be thinking about signposting the ‘transferable’ skills that students already gain from their more explicitly academic courses. This could be done in handbooks and seminars. However there should be academic freedom and this shouldn’t be compulsory”.*

Whilst there were also concerns from some staff that teaching ‘employability’ in the academic curriculum encourages students to be more interested in being equipped with ‘answers’ that ‘solve’ administrative problems which could potentially dilute the critical aspects of the academic debate (see comments about this issue by Christie 1993, and Beckmann and Cooper 2005), it was also noted by staff that there is not necessarily a conflict if addressed in the right way:

*“Critical Criminology: Understanding how the CJS works is good and not in conflict. We can study policing but still be critical”.*

*“Employability = empowerment, ie empowering students to make the most of their lives”.*

*“Employability and personal achievement are not necessarily dichotomously opposed. Surely part of seeing university in more than just narrow terms (a ‘grade’ they come out with) might be developing aspects of student’s personalities/skills that aren’t focussed on grades”.*

In summary, academic staff were generally positive about the module, although they had some concerns about issues such as workload and whether teaching on this issue was an appropriate role for academics, although it was generally accepted that study of this type could represent an opportunity to explore practice/theory links and boundaries.

*Student views on the module:*

Whilst anecdotally there had been some disquiet amongst students about studying ‘careers’ in the curriculum, which some saw either as not proper academic study or just being plain boring. However the response to the module after having experienced it was generally very positive:

Quantitative data collected from students on the module showed that:

- 89% strongly agreed or agreed that the CIP module helped with their career planning;
- Over 95% thought that doing a CV and a personal statement was useful or very useful
- 98% agreed or strongly agreed that it was useful and appropriate to study career planning in the curriculum;
- 84% disagreed or strongly disagreed that career planning should be up to the individual;
- 75% strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of studying the module that they were more prepared to enter the world of work.

Some typical positive qualitative comments were:

*"It made me actually think about what I wanted to do as it hadn't crossed my mind much at this stage".*

*"Allowed you the opportunity to gain valuable advice about the importance of volunteering and careers that you may not have thought about".*

*"It was an insight into what the university has to offer in terms of careers advice".*

*"The student led seminars look good on your CV as they show teamwork and leadership".*

*"Helped me write better CV's and personal statements and where to find info about careers".*

This was reassuring given that the staff team felt that it had been particularly important to make sure that students were aware of the help that was available to them to facilitate their career planning. Whilst the majority of comments were positive there were also some concerns from the students who studied the module. Some of these were particularly pertinent and identified potential gaps and problems in the programme:

*"It hasn't really helped me at all, it needs to be taken into account that not everyone is going straight into a crim job".*

*"Some aspects are not very appropriate for students wishing to continue with post graduate study".*

*"CV matched to career plan and taking CV to opportunities is pointless".*

In summary, after having been suspicious about the module, the student response after having studied the programme was generally positive. There were some valid criticisms about content although some students still struggled with the idea that practitioner talks or skills acquisition could be useful even if their area was not of specific interest to them:

*"Disappointed that there isn't a trip and also that there was not a representative from the police".*

*"Don't see the point in leading seminars, as I'm not interested in teaching".*

#### *Views from careers staff:*

The careers (opportunities) staff from the university had been significantly involved in the design and application of the module. Because it was seen as important for the students to find out what help was available from the university, a requirement was written into the assessment that students had to show and discuss their career plan and CV to the staff at opportunities. Whilst this was a good idea in theory there were a number of problematic practical issues reported by opportunities staff:

- Because a significant number of students did not know what they wanted to do, many of their CV's were not focussed onto specific employment as should be the case in best practice, and as a result were too general.
- A considerable number of students waited until the final day of the hand-in to visit the staff at opportunities therefore inundating the relatively small team of people with requests.

- A few students were so instrumental in that all they actually wanted from the careers staff was a signature to 'prove' to their tutor that they had visited the opportunities building, rather than seeking advice from them. This situation was exacerbated due to the high numbers of students visiting the careers staff on the final day of the hand-in.

Given these issues some considerations for improving the practice and content of the module included:

- Creating dedicated appointments with the careers staff to stop the final day rush, and to try and address the situation of students being so instrumental in that they identified the desired outcome of visiting the opportunities staff as being a signature rather than a way of gaining advice.
- Either changing the CV/Personal statement exercise to a more extensive career planning and reflection exercise or creating some more specific job exercises for students to aim their CV's towards.
- To bring in a 'checklist' so that the careers staff can incorporate written recommendations that the students can refer to later and follow up.

#### *Alumni experiences:*

In order to try and help current students plan their futures, data about their experiences after having left the university was collected from alumni. There were a number of interesting issues that were raised from this survey:

- *66% looked for work before graduation and by the end of 6 months 85% had started employment (a number of people took gap years or did a post graduate course).*
- *In describing their first job 11% described their first job as 'a career job' in comparison to 60% who described their current job as 'a career job'.*
- *By 12 months 76% had 'the type of work that they wanted'. The mean number of months by which the students had the type of job that they wanted was 9.2 (This has implications given that the time scale for the official collection of data is 6 months).*
- *Participants had undertaken between 1 and 8 different jobs, the average being just over 3.*
- *In their first job after graduating, 60% were doing work not related to their degree, 35% were doing work broadly related to their degree, and 2% were doing post graduate study.*
- *In their current work, 62% are now doing work broadly related to their degree, 33% are doing work not related to their degree, and 5% are involved in post graduate study.*

The significance of this is that it shows the problem with officially measuring graduate employability only 6 months after graduation, as is the case with the DLHE. For this sample of criminology graduates it was found that the average time that it took them to get 'the type of job that they wanted'<sup>8</sup> was over 9 months. However it is more than likely that the DLHE figures would suggest that the employability rate of these students was relatively poor.

Data from this sample showed that although the majority of students did not get a 'criminology related job' in the first instance, they did achieve this in subsequent employment. Some of the alumni identified that they took work that they were not necessarily interested in order to get on the job experience which then allowed them to get the work that they wanted. Alumni perceptions showed that 84% believed that their criminology degree had been a good choice of degree for them and 80% believed that their degree had prepared them well for employment.

### **Summary:**

In many ways it is not the adequacy of the benchmarks that is the issue here but two other related issues. Firstly whether 'employability' should be applied from within the curriculum or not, and secondly how 'employability' is measured formally as this then relates to whether courses are seen to fulfil the benchmarks adequately. For the first point, it is appropriate that the benchmarks are written in such a way as to allow many different ways of addressing these in the academy. The CIP module was specifically designed to try and bridge the theory/skills boundary taking a lead from Cohen (1981) when he argues that, because criminological knowledge does not exist within the pure academic world, but is also applied within the 'states crime control apparatus' an understanding of these 'institutional domains' is crucial for the understanding of the academic subject matter. In this sense therefore, the module treated 'employability' as an academic issue as well as a skills issue, and worked to identify the boundaries and links to students. The ethos of the module was also about empowering students so that in future, they are able to make more informed choices about they types of work that they may want to pursue, and also have the skills and knowledges to be able to apply themselves independently to career planning. The second point about how 'employability' is formally measured by the DLHE survey is more problematic for social science subjects such as criminology. Whilst many of the alumni in this survey have gone on to be involved in what would be defined in the survey as 'a graduate job', their history shows that many of them did not do this within the 6 month time scale of the DLHE survey. Unless this measure is significantly changed, academic departments can only try and counter this by other means such as identifying their own 'good news' stories relating to their alumni.

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<sup>8</sup> This would not necessarily be defined as 'a graduate job' by the DLHE survey.

## **Aims 2 and 3: Informing the Criminology curriculum and meeting employability benchmarks:**

To try and inform the criminology curriculum and meet employability benchmarks it is useful to identify what sort of skills employers' value in the workplace. Surveys of graduate employers have identified that whilst typical graduates have good skills in things like IT, team-working and problem solving, employers are critical of graduates in relation to their 'business or commercial awareness'. In the CBI future survey (2009) only 8% of employers were very satisfied with this aspect of graduates and 35% were not satisfied at all. This is in comparison to 2% not satisfied with IT, 10% not satisfied with team-working and 11% not satisfied with problem solving skills. In the same survey in terms of developing employability skills, students ranked 'business awareness' as the area that they had least developed in their courses with 38% stating that they had not developed business awareness at all from their course.

### *Employer survey:*

This survey, like others, identified that the subject of the degree that the graduate has achieved is not necessarily as important as their skills and competences, for instance 75% of the sample said that they would consider a graduate with any degree. Only 11% preferred people with 'traditional' degrees' such as English, History and Mathematics, and only 7% agreed with the statement 'the better universities produce the better employees'. Typical comments included:

*"A degree is a basic indicator of aptitude and application. People do not necessarily know what they would like to do after uni; their choice of degree topic is not an indication of their aptitude, aspiration or a constraint in their talent".*

*"We look for relative work experience and skills before degree subject or class".*

The top three attributes that were valued in their employees included: 'Positive attitude' 75%; 'The ability to work with others' 63% and 'Accepting responsibility' 58%. In terms of what made individuals more 'employable:

- *33% of employers said that relevant work experience/placement was essential and 60% said it was desirable;*
- *34% of employers said that 'business/customer awareness was essential and 57% said it was desirable;*
- *33% of employers said that specific subject knowledge/qualifications were essential and 54% said it was desirable.*
- *94% of employers said that they valued 'volunteering experiences' on a CV.*

In terms of identifying what type of skills employers thought graduates were particularly good at:

- *Employers thought that graduates were particularly good at IT skills followed by the ability to produce clear structured written work and developing appropriate solutions by analysing facts and situations;*

- *Graduates were seen as particularly poor at the ability to take calculated risks;*

*When asked what sort of skills should be specifically taught on degrees that would make graduates more employable, the top five were:*

- People skills
- Literacy skills
- Work appropriate attitudes
- Problem solving skills
- Time management.

Although the employers valued work experience, they did not necessarily see it as the job of the university course to specifically provide this as part of the curriculum.

In summary, employers in this sample have predominantly identified that a degree is a base-line requisite. Employers also look for how graduates fulfil the competences that they need in their organisations rather than the level or subject of the graduates degree. A comment from one of the participants to the student audience at the alumni evening demonstrated this when she stated:

*“Do your research... look at the person specifications and start working now to show how you can evidence the competences... as that’s what organisations short-list against”.*

#### *Alumni survey:*

The alumni survey identified that there were statistically significant differences between those who had been involved in activities outside of their degree, and those who had just studied and how they perceived their first employment. Those who did not take part in any activities apart from studying were more likely to describe their first job as ‘any job I could get to earn some money’ (88%) in comparison to those who had undertaken other activities such as paid/voluntary work or SU activities (38%). When asked whether their criminology degree had prepared them for employment:

- 80% of the alumni strongly agreed or agreed that their criminology degree had prepared them for employment. There was a statistically significant difference here in relation to degree grade, with those who had scored a higher degree grade being more positive.
- 98% strongly agreed or agreed that they had at sometime used the skills gained from their criminology degree in their employment.
- 76% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they had used their criminological knowledge (as opposed to generic skills) at some time in their employment.
- 84% believed that criminology had been a good choice to degree for them. There was a statistically significant difference in relation to degree class, with those who had scored a higher degree being more positive about their choice.

When asked whether particular aspects of their degree had either helped a lot, helped a little, not been useful or that this had not been applicable<sup>9</sup> we got the following results.

Type of skill	Helped a lot	Helped a little	Not useful	Not applicable
Presentation skills	74%	24%	2%	0%
Critical analysis	73%	22%	4%	2%
Group work	72%	24%	2%	2%
Independent study	68%	20%	2%	11%
Research skills	67%	29%	4%	0%
Report writing	67%	26%	6%	2%
IT skills	57%	39%	2%	2%
Oral Exam	58%	27%	11%	4%
Criminological Knowledge	49%	33%	7%	11%
Doing personal statement	48%	30%	9%	13%
Conference	42%	36%	4%	18%
Careers lectures	38%	49%	9%	4%
Practitioner lectures	30%	44%	19%	7%

When asked (open question) what was the single most useful thing that they did in their degree that helped their employability, the participants tended to state a number of different things, rather than just one. The top five in order of importance were:

- Presentation and communication skills
- Confidence building
- Critical and theoretical understanding and the ability to create evidence based arguments.
- Group work
- Research Methods and IT

### **Summary:**

**In terms of meeting benchmarks and informing the curriculum these results raise a number of issues: Firstly to help improve employability, students should be encouraged to partake in activities outside their studying, so that they have the potential to be able to evidence competences beyond their degree, when they are applying for work. This should potentially make them more 'employable'. Secondly it is desirable that this encouragement should be applied in the first year, particularly as volunteering experiences may not be**

<sup>9</sup> This was to allow for the joint students who did not cover all of the criminology curriculum.

available for students later on in their course. This is because organisations often require a long term commitment in return for the training that they offer, and third year students do not fulfil this requirement or in some cases do not have the time to give, due to their final year workload. Thirdly some of the skills from the degree that have come to be valued by alumni are often those that are not very popular with students. Presentation skills, research skills and particularly group-work are particularly criticised by students, but both employers and alumni see these as being particularly valuable in comparison to other learning experiences that would on the surface seem more career appropriate, such as careers and practitioner lectures, and 'doing a personal statement'.

#### **Aim 4: Informing careers practitioners:**

To consider how we can inform careers practitioners, it would be useful to identify how students both perceive and use that careers service at university. Clearly this may be different depending on the university, so the data here may not be directly applicable to other universities. However there are some general themes that are of interest. One of the problems is that although according to the CBI future fit survey (2009 p14) 78% of students are confident that they know what employers are looking for, this is not borne out in practice. Whilst students learn many different skills and competences from their degree studies and beyond, anecdotal practice suggests that students don't always recognise or use these skills to evidence competences when filling in application forms. Without stating the obvious, it could be argued that any way of improving the ability of students to recognise the key skills that they have and effectively apply them to the competences stated in application forms, is likely to improve their abilities to find suitable employment. Whilst one of the purposes of the CIP module was to do this within the curriculum, it is also important for students generally to be aware of the help and guidance that is available to them from specialist support staff.

#### *Student survey about the university careers service:*

Before undertaking the module, we asked students who they would be most likely to ask for help in filling in application forms. Although the university has trained staff which the students can access to help them do this we found that:

- 51% of the students stated that they would ask their family,
- 11% stated friends,
- 6% stated 'someone' at the university and
- 4% stated an employment agency.

In terms of who they might ask at university for help in filling in an application form, before the module it was found that the students were more likely to ask their tutor (49%) in comparison to the careers staff (31%) and 20% did not know.

After having studied the CIP module:

- The careers service came out top at 57% followed by tutors, family, friends and employment agency.

- 50% had visited the careers staff<sup>10</sup>
- 40% had visited the job shop
- 40% had visited the community volunteers
- 45% had applied to do voluntary work
- 40% had applied to do some paid work.

In terms of students who had visited any of the careers services, we found that 26% said they had visited opportunities, 7% had used the drop in service, 2% had used the appointment service and 15% had used the job shop. Those who had visited these services all found these services useful.

Most students did say that they intended to use the service with 64% planning to use the service this year, 18% planning to use the service next year, although 16% had not thought about using the service and 2% were unaware that the university had a careers service.

It is clear that students make extensive use of the internet in many aspects of their lives including career planning. After they had studied the module, 92% had accessed the university careers website, in comparison to 32% before. Unsurprisingly the internet came out top in terms of where students thought they might find appropriate jobs, both before and after graduation.

Students views about how they would find out about available jobs whilst at the university and after graduating, unsurprisingly showed that again the internet was the favoured way of finding out about suitable employment. Before graduation the top three were the internet, the university careers services and employment agencies and after graduation, the internet, recruitment agencies and newspapers.

#### *Alumni experience of the university careers service:*

We also were interested in seeing how the alumni rated the careers help that they had received from the university in the light of their career development after graduation.

- A considerable number of alumni (44%) did not look for work until after they had graduated.
- 49% of women had used the university careers interview or drop in services in comparison to 22% of men.
- Women seemed to employ wider and more creative searches than men, when looking for work, being much more likely to select 'other' than men.
- Local and national newspapers were the source of choice for graduates looking for work.

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<sup>10</sup> This survey was undertaken a number of weeks before the hand-in, so it is likely that this was an underestimate, given that we know that many students visited the careers service in the days before the hand in.

### Where did graduates look for jobs?

Facility	%
University careers office/website	40
Graduate recruitment sites	49
Local Newspapers	78
National Newspapers	55
Regional graduate careers websites	29
Other (eg specific organisational sites)	40

- First time university applicants were more likely to access a full guidance interview than those with a family university history.
- Those who took part in other activities apart from studying were more likely to access a full guidance interview in comparison to those who only were involved in studying.

### Summary:

There are a number of issues raised by this data that may be relevant in informing university careers professionals. It is clearly important that the university careers service is advertised effectively to students, as before being informed of the services available through the CIP module, the favoured source of guidance for filling in things like application forms was family and friends. Whilst this is not necessarily a problem, it may depend on how well informed those sources are about current issues in successfully seeking and gaining employment. It also might represent the fact that students tend to be instrumental about their university study in that they often only address issues if they believe them to be temporally significant. Therefore employment is seen as an issue for the end of their course, when in reality to get the best out of the opportunities that are available through university study; their planning should begin when they begin their course. The results also suggest that the internet appears to be an important source of information for students in locating available jobs, so it would seem important to ensure that university careers sites are advertised, easy to use and their availability advertised. The data showed some interesting gender differences relating to use of careers services, but further research would be needed to identify why was might be. Other significant differences showed that first time university entrants were more likely to use some of the careers services, but this might be due to their families not being in a position to advise their sons and daughters. Although careers guidance was available from the university after the students had graduated, very few took advantage of this (15%), and given that a significant number of graduates looked for work after having graduated (44%), they may have missed the opportunity to access specialist help from the university that may have helped them with their career planning and job acquisition.

## **Aim 5: Providing information how criminology departments can better engage with employers.**

Criminology is a relatively recent addition to undergraduate portfolios. Although having a considerable postgraduate history and inclusion in sociological undergraduate degrees under the 'sociology of deviance' umbrella, the study of 'criminology' as an dedicated undergraduate subject was quite rare before the mid 1990's. Both academic and careers staff have concerns about the myths that tend permeate the subject of criminology, which sometimes appear to originate from popular television programmes such as 'Cracker' in the 1990's and more recently 'CSI'. Because of this, it was of interest to see what a sample of employers understood about this discipline. This was also of importance as erroneous beliefs about what skills a criminology student will have, may result in dissatisfaction when the reality does not match the expectations. For instance one of the employers in the sample suggested that they "could be interested in their ability with statistics". If this was meant to refer to a critical appreciation of statistical evidence or perhaps some methodological competence in quantitative data collection and analysis, the employer would be right in thinking that the criminology graduate would have the skills that they needed. Alternatively if they were looking more at a greater level of mathematical skill and technical competence, then it is unlikely that most undergraduate criminology courses would provide graduates with such expertise. Employer perceptions of the discipline of criminology showed that:

- 67% had heard of 'Criminology' as an undergraduate degree.
- 83% thought that criminology graduates would have much the same skills as any other undergraduate student.
- 83% thought criminology graduates would have good IT skills

Although...

- 20% thought the degree taught 'finger printing and detective skills' (50% disagreed and 30% stated that they did not know).
- 38% agreed that criminology graduates were likely to have skills that were relevant to most jobs (32% disagreed and 29% did not know).
- 71% said they would consider employing a criminology graduate:
  - *'If they met the requirements of the person specification'*
  - *'If they had the relevant skills their degree would not be of the utmost importance'*
  - *'Have already employed one and he's good!'*

### **Summary:**

**Although the majority of the sample of employers had heard of criminology as a degree subject, some were of the opinion that it was more of a technical discipline relating to finger printing and detective skills, rather than an academic social science. As was the case with other degrees, the majority of the sample stated that they would be happy to employ a criminology graduate as long as they had skills and competences that were relevant to their organisation. Whilst it is clearly important that employers have some understanding of the nature of criminology as a degree, employers consistently identify that it is the skills and competences that a graduate has**

that they are interested in. To this end, the fundamental thing that students need to understand from the outset is that they need to be able to:

- Identify and articulate to others what skills they are learning from their degree;
- Research the career area that they are interested in so that they know what competences they need to be able to show to employers;
- Develop other skills beyond their degree;
- Learn how to apply and evidence their skills to person specifications.

## **Outcomes/Resources:**

This research has been used in a number of ways:

1. Colloquia and World café event with colleagues (April 2010 at the University of Lincoln). Preliminary results from the research were shared with colleagues from the school of social sciences, which includes staff from the disciplines of politics, social policy, international relations and social science as well as criminology.

A brief overview of the collective intelligence from the world café session with colleagues from the school of social sciences was as follows:

- We need to encourage and inform students that the university experience is about more than a degree grade.
- Although a problematic term, 'employability' in the curriculum can be seen in terms of student empowerment, rather than sterile information gathering.
- It is possible to rationalise 'Critical criminology' with employability and treat it as an exercise that bridges the boundary between theory and practice.
- It was decided that it would be useful to signpost employability skills in student handbooks more generally, to help students reflect on their skills in an informed way.

2. A Careers information day was held on July 14<sup>th</sup> 2010 in the Enterprise Building at the University of Lincoln: There is a 'Mahara' portfolio available containing various materials as well as the 'collective intelligence' from the world café session with the delegates that attended. See the link below to access these (need to paste this URL into your browser):

<http://portfolios.lincoln.ac.uk/view/view.php?t=bGZKBvbeHULh4htLzyKK>

3. Paper delivered under the 'Teaching and Learning' strand of the Social Policy Association Conference July 2010 'Social Policy in times of change': by J. Jameson, K. Strudwick, S. Bond-Taylor and M. Jones entitled: Academic principles versus employability pressures: A modern power struggle or a creative opportunity. It is planned to submit this paper to a suitable journal on Higher Education Teaching.

4. A Criminology alumni evening was held in March 2010 for staff and students at the University of Lincoln. Although this was specifically aimed at the level 2 students studying on the criminology in the professions module, students from levels 1 and 3 were invited and some attended.

5. As a follow on from the videoing of the alumni evening, academic and careers staff collaborated with the alumni office to produce an information DVD called 'Life after criminology'. This DVD, which is approximately 15 minutes long, includes contributions from students, academic and careers staff as well as the criminology

alumni who took part in the evening. This was officially premiered at the careers information day where delegates thought it would be useful for current students as well as pre-entry guidance. It is planned to make this available either as a hard copy or by uploading it to a video streaming facility to enable public access. We also have possession of a DVD of the whole alumni event which we intend to use for teaching purposes in the module, and also to make some short podcasts for the careers web site, and for use to aid pre-entry guidance for open-days.

6. Development of the Criminology in the professions module: Reflection from this research has allowed us to develop a strategy to improve the module. This will include:

- Development of the CV and personal statement task to make this a more focussed and realistic exercise;
- Devising a more formal strategy of student appointments with the careers staff to improve this experience both for students and staff;
- Making the links between academic study, technical knowledge and generic skills more obvious to the students so that they can independently apply and use this to develop their academic learning and technical practice in future;
- Beyond the module, using third year students that have completed the module to communicate to first year students that their career planning should start from the beginning of their time at university, so they are able to take advantage of the opportunities available to them outside of their degree studies.
- Showing first year students the 'Life after Criminology' DVD in induction week.

7. Future Plans:

A submission of an abstract on the teaching of employability in the curriculum to the SRHE (Society into Research into Higher Education) Conference Dec 2010.

A submission to ELiSS Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences for the Special edition 'Higher Education Futures'.

## **Implications:**

Universities do not work within a perfect or fair system. The official DLHE survey for evaluating university 'employability' (a problematic term in itself) at six months after graduation has been criticised as favouring vocational courses, which is problematic for academic courses like criminology. University staff are also working in a situation where conflicting messages abound regarding the availability of graduate jobs (AGCAS 2010 Survey figures don't add up). Whilst it may not be possible to significantly change the system, it is useful to be aware of how the system works in order to make teaching and learning more effective. The alumni sample that we surveyed put 'confidence building' as one of the most important things that their degree gave them. The significance of this is that whilst staff can't stop the uncertainty and bad news stories, with knowledge, they can help to equip students with strategies to give them the confidence to address problematic situations, rather than being undermined by them. Good news stories about alumni can inspire students, and equipping students with a framework that allows them to understand how theory, skills and technical knowledge are linked will help them to reflect on and apply their competences to situations beyond university. Cohen (1981) argues that knowledge about how 'crime' organisations work is fundamental due to the fact that

criminological knowledge does not exist within the pure academic world, but is applied within the crime control system of the state. These observations gave us as a team of academic criminologists, good theoretical reasons to make employability an academic issue.

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**University of Lincoln Research Team:**

**Jill Jameson**  
Senior Lecturer in Criminology  
[jjameson@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:jjameson@lincoln.ac.uk)

**Katie Strudwick**  
Senior Lecturer in Criminology  
[kstrudwick@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:kstrudwick@lincoln.ac.uk)

**Sue Bond-Taylor**  
Senior Lecturer in Criminology  
[sbtaylor@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:sbtaylor@lincoln.ac.uk)

**Mandy Jones**  
Head of Opportunities  
[majones@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:majones@lincoln.ac.uk)

# Appendix 1: Criminology in the Professions:

## Module synopsis:

The aim of the module is to set out how the methodological, academic and practical skills gained from your degree can be applied to your professional development culminating in the production of a professional development file. In partnership with the university's careers service you will be encouraged to explore potential links between researching for academic work and researching for relevant career applications and week by week you will be involved in the development of a reflexive log, and various other items that are designed to develop your awareness of professional practice in professions related to your criminology degree.

## Outline Syllabus

- Identification of career planning in a criminological context.
- Development of practical career planning skills.
- Reflection on the political, theoretical and practical context of the work done by selected visiting practitioners.
- Coverage of a variety of career possibilities and experiences.
- Evaluation and reflection.

**Learning Outcomes:** Upon completion of this module you will be able to:

- Explore professional opportunities and recruitment and selection methods related to criminological study and understand how methodological and academic skills can support this exploration.
- Understand how a theoretical, political and practical reflection is useful in your personal professional development.
- To work independently and in a group situation to develop knowledge and techniques that can be applied to future recruitment opportunities.
- Reflect critically upon your own research skills and academic development.

## Teaching and Learning strategy:

Whilst it is clear how research skills are essential for academic study, this module shows how research techniques can be applied to other tasks, and encourages you to understand the transfer of such skills to other life long learning strategies, such as personal career development. The module starts with an introductory lecture that considers the many different professional opportunities that might be available for graduates in criminology. This is supplemented by IT workshops to explore the availability and locations of graduate career information, and to work on C.V. building techniques plus number of student led seminars that cover important practical career development skills. Leading on from this, a series of practitioner led lectures with supporting student led seminars will take place where you will be asked to evaluate the practitioner contributions on a number of levels. Throughout the module you will be expected to be involved in leading seminars and also make weekly contributions to your personal reflexive log which will become part of your personal professional development file (PDF) along with the practitioner evaluations, career development tasks, and a career development information leaflet/magazine article. As is the case in the workplace, you will be expected to attend and participate professionally in all sessions. All students will take part in at least one informal presentation and one student led discussion and will be required to incorporate an assessment of their own and other student presentations/discussions in their PDF.

**Assessment: Professional Development file: (3000 words)** This should include the following:

- Your Career Plan: 250 words
- An evaluation of your current skills base: 250 words
- Developing Skills: 250 words
- Personal statement: 500 words
- Alumni reflection: 250 words
- Discourse analysis of the practitioner lectures: 1500 words.
- Your CV
- 6 Power point slides from your presentation about career ideas for criminologists.

## **Appendix 2 Profiles of participants in the surveys:**

*Alumni sample: Profile of the participants:*

55 Participants

67% Females and 33% Males

74% Single Hons and 26% Joint Hons (eg students who studied criminology with another subject such as Law or Psychology).

46% were the first person in their immediate family to go to university.

<b>Graduation Year</b>	<b>% of sample</b>
1999-2001	17%
2002-2004	21%
2005-2007	28%
2008	34%

<b>Degree level</b>	<b>% of sample</b>
First class	13%
Upper second	62%
Lower second	25%

*Employer sample: Profile of the participants:*

67 Participants

56% Males and 44% Females

<b>What type of employer?</b>	<b>% of sample</b>
Private sector	68%
Public sector	20%
Voluntary sector	8%
Other	4%

<b>Number employed</b>	<b>% of sample</b>
Less than 10	36%
11-50	18%
51-200	17%
201+	29%

<b>Type of employment</b>	<b>% of sample</b>
Professional	85%
Administration	57%
Technical	44%
Other	27%