



# Subject Benchmark Statement

Criminology

March 2022



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## About this Statement

This document is a QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Criminology that defines what can be expected of a graduate in the subject, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular subject or area. Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as a membership organisation on behalf of the higher education sector. A summary of the Statement is also available on the QAA website.

Key changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement include:

- a revised structure for the Statement which includes the introduction of cross-cutting themes of:
  - equality, diversity and inclusion
  - education for sustainable development
  - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education
- a comprehensive review updating the context and purposes of Criminology, including course design and content in order to inform and underpin the revised benchmark standards.

## How can I use this document?

Subject Benchmark Statements are often used by higher education providers in the design and development of new courses in the relevant subject, as they provide a framework for specifying intended learning outcomes in an academic or vocational discipline. They are also used as a reference point when reviewing or revalidating degree courses. They may be used by external examiners in considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with other higher education providers. They also provide professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with the academic standards expected of students.

Subject Benchmark Statements provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with a course but are not intended to represent a national curriculum in a subject or to prescribe set approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Instead, they allow for flexibility and innovation in course design within a framework agreed by the subject community.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses in Criminology
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Criminology
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Criminology graduates.

## Relationship to legislation and regulation

The responsibility for academic standards lies with the higher education provider who awards the degree. Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them by their relevant funding and regulatory bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements.

The regulatory status of the Statement will differ with regard to the educational jurisdictions of the UK. In England, Subject Benchmark Statements are not sector-recognised standards as set out under the Office for Students' [regulatory framework](#). However, they are specified

as a key reference point, as appropriate, for academic standards in Wales under [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#) and in Scotland as part of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#). Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality requirements in Northern Ireland. Because the Statement describes outcomes and attributes expected at the threshold standard of achievement in a UK-wide context, many higher education providers will use them as an enhancement tool for course design and approval, and for subsequent monitoring and review, in addition to helping demonstrate the security of academic standards.

## **Additional reference points**

Higher education providers are likely to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. QAA has also published [Advice and Guidance](#) to support the [Quality Code which will be helpful](#) when using this Statement, for example, in [course design](#), [learning and teaching](#), [external expertise](#) and [monitoring and evaluation](#).

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in [QAA's Glossary](#). Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Statement where appropriate.

# 1 Context and purposes of a Criminology degree

## Context

1.1 Criminology is taught as a single honours degree course or in combination with other subjects as part of a joint honours course. This Subject Benchmark Statement provides a benchmark for the core curriculum for Criminology that is ordinarily covered in an honours degree course.

1.2 This Statement establishes academic standards for Criminology. It does not describe occupational or professional standards, although many occupational groups have contributed to the thinking that underpins this Statement, including the professional body for criminology in the UK - the British Society of Criminology. This Statement sets out the abilities and skills which someone graduating in Criminology is expected to possess. It does not prescribe substantive content, but rather indicates the areas of knowledge which constitute the core of the subject. Within this broad approach, diversity and creativity in teaching as well as in research are accommodated, thereby allowing new knowledge and creative interpretation to flourish. The document applies to all parts of the UK, and it is anticipated that teaching and learning will reflect variations in local concerns and individual provider arrangements.

1.3 This document relates mainly to bachelor's degrees with honours, although Criminology is also studied at levels above and below this, for example through foundation degrees and postgraduate degrees. It follows that foundation degrees mark progression towards the standard described here, and that master's degrees go beyond the standard in terms of depth and breadth of knowledge and in terms of the development of how to use tools and techniques for critical analysis (benchmark standards for postgraduate degrees are set out). Foundation degrees are frequently designed and delivered in partnership with employers to equip people with the relevant knowledge and skills for business. They may be offered by universities, often in association with further education colleges. The study methods can be very flexible, which means that they are available to people already in work, those wishing to embark on a career change, and those who have recently completed qualifications.

1.4 Criminology was multidisciplinary and commonly taught at postgraduate level when it was introduced in UK higher education in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Undergraduate degrees in Criminology developed more recently. There are numerous postgraduate courses in existence in the UK; some of these courses are generalist, while others pursue specialisms (for example, in police studies, security, criminal justice policy, international criminology, forensic psychology and criminal justice). Postgraduate courses place particular emphasis on competence to carry out research and are often guided by the Economic and Social Research Council's guidelines for research training.

## Purposes of a Criminology degree

1.5 Criminology, like all academic subjects, is constantly developing. As such, the importance attached to different historical and contemporary theories continually changes. The constant emergence of new theories generates new areas of criminological enquiry and Criminology courses can benefit from the development of new modules informed by the research interests of teaching staff. Such new areas of enquiry may also be informed by changing political, economic and social concerns, or by changes within other subjects such as sociology, social policy, law, politics or philosophy. In spite of this constant production of new knowledge, however, the core of the subject area remains relatively constant.

1.6 Criminology is concerned with:

- processes of criminalisation and victimisation whether by or of individuals, groups, family, community, institutions or state
- social, legal and cultural meanings of crime, harm, deviance and stigmatised differences, including historical, cultural and decolonising perspectives
- causes and organisation of crime, harm and deviance at individual, group, family, community, institutional and state levels
- practical and political processes of preventing and managing crime
- understanding the interrelationship of crime, harm, deviance and victimisation in relation to class, gender, age, race and ethnicity, disability, religious faith and sexuality
- official and unofficial responses to crime, deviance, and social and/or environmental harm
- representations of crime, harm, deviance, offenders, victims, and agents and agencies of control in the media, popular and high culture and official discourses, whether these be public or private.

1.7 This list should not be seen to be exhaustive nor mutually exclusive.

## **Characteristics of a Criminology degree**

1.8 Criminology includes knowledge and understanding of the following core areas that would be ordinarily covered by both single and joint honours courses. Single honours students would study these areas at greater depth.

- the development of criminology as a distinct area of study and inquiry, and its interdisciplinary nature
- alternative theoretical approaches within criminology, and contemporary debates about the content and scope of criminology
- how crime, social harm, deviance and victimisation are socially and legally constructed
- the different sources of information about crime, harm and victimisation, both quantitative and qualitative, and how they are produced - including their location in particular legal, political, social and ideological frameworks - and how they can be interpreted
- trends in crime, harm and victimisation
- different forms of crime and their social organisation
- relationships of crime, harm, deviance and victimisation to social divisions such as age, gender, sexuality, social class, race, ethnicity, disability and religious faith
- the development, role, organisation and governance of efforts to reduce and prevent crime, deviance, harm and victimisation, and to ensure personal and public safety and security in different locations, including the role of the state and non-governmental agencies
- human rights and social justice issues in relation to preventive and pre-emptive measures
- the social and historical development of the main institutions involved in crime control and criminal justice in different locations
- the philosophy and politics of criminalisation, victimisation, criminal justice, crime control and modes of punishment

- the use of discretion in relation to justice processes, including issues of discrimination and diversity
- the development of penal and alternative policies in different locations and their relationship to social change
- the main forms of sentence and alternatives; the governance, roles and structure of the agencies involved; and offenders' experiences of adjudication and sentence
- representations of victimisation, crime, harm and deviance, and of the main criminal justice and other agents and institutions as found in the mass media, new media, in official reports and in public opinion
- how to develop a reflective approach and a critical awareness of the values of local cultures and local politics, and of the student's own values, biography and social identity, and how to bring these skills to bear in an informed response to crime and victimisation
- awareness of how political and cultural values - including the student's own - have an impact on responses to and rival interpretations of crime, harm, safety and security, policing, criminal and youth justice, sentencing, and alternative responses to offending
- how to make ethically sound judgements in relation to research carried out by others or oneself.

## **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

1.9 Debates about equality, diversity and inclusion are at the forefront of the discipline of criminology and have historically and contemporarily been relevant to exploring critical social issues, such as human rights, the criminalisation of people and behaviours, victimisation, punishment, policing, social harm and media reporting of crime. Criminology's global and interdisciplinary perspectives also offer opportunities for critical reflection on the role of cultural biases, colonialism (past and present) and conflict in shaping criminal justice systems, as well as people's experiences of crime and victimisation. Criminology, therefore, offers students the opportunity to engage in contemporary social and criminal justice related matters, such as recognition of systemic and cultural discrimination, and bias between and across groups in society.

1.10 Criminologists have a responsibility to engage with students to ensure inclusivity in practice as well as theoretically and conceptually. In addition, equality issues relate to the fair and lawful treatment of students and staff. Not only is there a responsibility to meet public sector equality duties as set down in legislation, but there is an expectation that the discipline will ensure that equality-related matters are embedded within the curriculum. The study of equality, diversity and inclusion must be embedded within and across curricula, ensuring that our learning communities can prepare our graduates to make positive contributions to increasingly diverse workplaces and societies. To achieve this, criminology must endeavour to create inclusivity in the learning experience, design and delivery.

1.11 Equality and diversity practice must be embedded in the planning and design stage of courses and curricula, through learning design. This could include ensuring principles of equity and equality are embedded in the design, planning and evaluation of the course; creating safe learning environments for students to express their ideas and beliefs; student involvement in assessment and delivery design; and ensuring the curriculum is flexible, accessible and responsive to an evolving and varied student population. Students will be respected as individual learners and may be engaged with as co-creators and co-producers of knowledge. Building flexibility into course design can ensure students are able to access a range of study materials, across a variety of delivery methods.

1.12 Equality and diversity should be further addressed at each stage of the student learning journey to achieve an inclusive learning experience. Criminology must ensure that students feel a sense of belonging, and a recognition that their experiences will enrich their learning rather than be a barrier to their success. Opportunities for meaningful and respectful dialogue and engagement within and across diverse student groups will contribute to an inclusive learning experience, such as ensuring that a lack of experience does not exclude them from fulfilling their potential, as well as considering the type of learning environment best suited to meeting student needs. Students should be supported to express their ideas and beliefs across a range of sensitive and controversial subject areas within the discipline, in a collaborative, safe and collegiate environment, as well as being supported to reflect on how their own experiences may be shaping their views. Further, criminology should reflect critically on enabling increased participation with external communities, groups and public spaces to promote opportunities for embedding diverse cultural, social and institutional engagements at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

1.13 Finally, equality and diversity should form the basis for disciplinary practice and delivery. Inclusivity must be seen as an ongoing process of quality review and enhancement, to promote equality of opportunity for students, while proactively addressing and removing barriers to learning and participation. At all stages of curriculum and course review, criminology should ensure that inclusivity is reflected upon and embedded as a catalyst for change. Course teams must consider whether there are hidden or overt barriers to success for certain groups of students and identify what changes could be undertaken to welcome under-represented groups. Existing students should likewise be exposed to safe and collaborative methods of learning and expression, with a sense of being part of a shared community. Additionally, course teams should establish an environment that reflects appropriate role models among staff, active student support, and considered and thoughtful language to facilitate inclusion and diversity. The flexible manner in which the discipline can be studied (part-time, full-time, online, face-to-face, blended/hybrid) has also broadened the inclusive nature of the subject area.

1.14 Criminology degrees have traditionally attracted learners from a wide range of backgrounds, including, for example: mature students, students from non-traditional academic backgrounds, students from disadvantaged or less affluent backgrounds and students with caring responsibilities, disabilities and/or mental health considerations. As such, greater attention should be directed at under-represented groups at all stages, from recruitment, marketing, education and career progression to after graduation, in order to make certain that inclusive practice is both internally and externally visible. This will ensure criminology is recognised as a diverse global discipline that supports all students to reach their full potential.

## **Sustainability**

1.15 In order to ensure the sustainability of the discipline, criminology has to be fit for purpose and the purpose has to be clearly defined. Sustainability of criminology can be considered on two levels: within the University, as internal programme sustainability, and also as a discipline in the contemporary world (external). Internal sustainability of Criminology courses should not only be based on the recruitment numbers, but on ensuring that the curriculum is contemporary and encompassing of new and emerging theoretical and methodological developments, for example: green criminology, queer criminology, southern criminology, indigenous knowledge, and zemiology.

1.16 Specifically, within the discipline, green criminology has grown in influence within recent years. green criminology addresses forms of crime that cause harm to the environment, explores ecological justice and studies environmental law and criminality. This focus encompasses individual crime, state failure in environmental protection and corporate



crime. The design of Criminology curricula should include consideration of green criminology perspectives.

1.17 At its core, criminology is a merger between academia and practice. Theoretical approaches both inform and support practical applications and implementations to prepare students for professional life outside academia. The sustainability of Criminology degrees is directly linked with accessibility, employability and partnerships (please see the relevant sections below). Therefore, sustainable education includes working with criminal justice system agencies, practitioners, cross-sectors and cross-cultures to reflect ever-developing security and global challenges. Criminology, together with criminal and social justice agencies of a domestic and international nature, should aim to be proactive and pre-emptive, rather than just reactive. This will ensure sustainability of the discipline, which is of crucial importance when it comes to educating future practitioners, leaders, and research and development of modern remits in the quest for social justice. Innovation and standardisation of concepts and practices (including pedagogy) should also be considered when developing and managing sustainable education.

1.18 Due to the nature of the discipline, ethics form an important part of teaching, research, theoretical, and methodological approaches respectively. Ethics cannot exist without sustainability, and sustainability cannot exist without ethics. Understanding and consideration of ethics is crucial for the development of criminology as a discipline, and it also should be considered at the development, updating and reviewing stages of the courses. Closely linked with ethics is studying emotive topics, which require a delicate balance of ethical considerations such as equality, diversity, open-mindedness, impartiality and accessibility. The success of this forms part of the sustainability of the programme and discipline alike.

1.19 QAA and Advance HE supports the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The focus on ESD presents a major update from previous Criminology Subject Benchmark Statement guidance. According to Advance HE and QAA (2021, p.8):

'ESD develops competencies, that is, skills, attributes and values, and how they link to subject knowledge and knowledge of Sustainable Development. ESD supports learners across all academic disciplines and subject areas to create and pursue visions of a better world. A world that recognises the interdependence of environmental integrity, social justice and economic prosperity, while acknowledging that environmental resources are finite and provide the foundation for our society and economy.'

1.20 Therefore, understanding the multi-disciplinary nature of criminology should guide the practices of curricular development and teaching methodologies, which empowers learners to critically understand the interconnectedness between culture, economy, environment and globalisation. Ultimately, university education, and criminology in particular, has a significant role to play in achieving the aims of the ESD - transforming society and providing the foundation for a safer and sustainable world.

1.21 Criminology should also offer students knowledge across several subject areas, such as poverty, social justice, environmental and social harms, which enables learners to gain greater awareness of sustainable development and global citizenship and equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to address 'social, environmental and economic concerns to create a better world' (ESD Guidance, 2021, p.8).

1.22 Criminology students develop a range of skills, such as critical thinking, presenting effective arguments and the ability to listen to others; all crucial skills for global citizenship and criminal justice and security settings. When possible, students should be encouraged to pursue volunteering or work placements opportunities, which relate to sustainability of both

educational development and the discipline within and beyond the academic realm. Such service and work learning can be embedded within modules. It is therefore implied to consider creating opportunities for applied learning in relation to sustainability where possible.

1.23 Further guidance on developing ESD can be found on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development).

## **Entrepreneurship and enterprise education**

1.24 Students of Criminology at honours degree level are expected to develop a range of skills that will enable them to comprehend methodological concepts and principles. This includes understanding the relationship between theory and methods in criminological research and more specialist knowledge about the role, functions and practices of criminal justice agencies.

1.25 There is a necessity to recognise the cross-over and value of research ethics for framing employability and enterprise. The socio-legal and research-based elements of criminology, and its mooring within the social sciences, promotes generic critical thinking, questioning and reflection. Criminology considers the national and global context relating to graduate employability, understanding the pertinent issues and contradictions within the subject broadly. It is valuable as critical education and often enables students to be more aware of what they need, beyond their degree, to be successful in gaining appropriate employment.

1.26 Employment pathways often extend far beyond the immediate concerns of criminal and social justice systems as criminology embraces a social scientific commitment to lifelong learning and pro-learning mindset for personal and professional development and critical self-reflection. With an emphasis on research, scholarship and enquiry, criminology provides students with a systematic and critical assessment of complex 'justice' problems and issues and develop students' knowledge, skills and qualities to enable their success in a rapidly changing workplace as national and global citizens. It is also recognised, however, that via the College of Policing and the National Probation Service, for example, through the development of an improved and sustainable workforce across the UK's criminal justice sector, the subject is increasingly positioned as both an applied and a theoretical qualification that is understood and recognised for its multiple benefits.

1.27 Opportunities for students to develop their employability skills should be offered at an appropriate point in the course. This may be in traditional placement opportunities, or volunteering, or through in-module developments, such as assessments linked to employability-based skills, or the use of guest speakers on courses to link theory to practice. Such opportunities provide students with the chance to engage with the applied nature of criminology, as well as enhancing transferable skills. They can operate both within and outside of the formal curriculum and, when integrated, students may be invited to reflect on their experiences within the broader context of their criminological knowledge as part of their assessment. Safeguards are put in place for the protection of students' rights from work-based exploitation and/or harassment. It is also important that employers who offer placement and volunteering opportunities consider accessibility and reasonable adjustments where needed, and that any additional support is in place.

## **2 Distinctive features of a Criminology degree**

### **Design**

2.1 Research and critical enquiry underpin criminology; therefore, students are expected to develop a range of skills that will enable them to comprehend methodological concepts and principles. This includes understanding the relationship between theory, evidence and methods in criminological research.

### **Threshold and typical level**

2.2 At threshold and typical level, students are expected to understand arguments in the philosophy of explanation in contemporary criminological research. Thus, an understanding of the concepts of ontology and epistemology for the design, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of criminological research will be important. Students will also be expected to understand the fundamental distinction which can be made between qualitative and quantitative research strategies, as well as the debates surrounding mixing the two (mixed methods research), and from this develop an understanding of inductive and deductive relationships between theory and research. They should also be able to discern which data collection and analysis methods are suitable for different kinds of research questions, bearing in mind that research may use multiple methods and/or mixed methods.

### **Excellent level**

2.3 At excellent level of achievement (first class level) students are not only expected to be able to discuss the relationship between theory and method in criminological research, but to develop the ability to criticise and apply concepts in criminological thought to the design of research projects. At this level students should be able to demonstrate an ability to criticise the philosophy of explanation adopted by criminological studies. In other words, they should be able to appreciate the ethical implications of the chosen research methods and the political value of different interpretations of research data and findings.

### **Postgraduate level**

2.4 At a postgraduate level, students are not only expected to be able to comprehend key methodological concepts and principles, and develop an ability to criticise and apply concepts in criminological thought to the design of research projects, but also recognise nuanced debates. At postgraduate level there is an expectation of the development of a wider range of skills and competencies than at undergraduate level and demonstration of ability to design and implement criminological research projects in real world situations, while making use of a wide repertoire of research methods and strategies.

### **Skills and competencies**

2.5 At a basic level, students are expected to have foundational knowledge of the following in relation to both qualitative and quantitative methods: how to develop a research question and design research; how to reflect on research designs and practice, thinking in particular about positionality and power imbalances.

2.6 In relation to qualitative methods at a basic level, students are expected to have a foundational knowledge of different approaches available, which may include:

- case study design
- interviewing (including knowledge of the difference between structured, semi-structured and unstructured interview schedules)

- focus groups
- observation
- documentary and discourse analysis
- ethnography
- virtual ethnography
- participatory action research
- decolonising research methods with indigenous communities
- internet research (including social media research techniques)
- evaluation methods
- visual methods
- sampling strategies
- the differences between description, analysis and interpretation in regard to analysis
- how to index and retrieve qualitative data
- the limits to interpretation
- internet research.

2.7 At a higher or more advanced level, students would be expected to demonstrate knowledge and possible use of some of the following qualitative techniques and software:

- coding qualitative data
- analysis qualitative data
- interpretation of qualitative findings
- using qualitative software to facilitate analysis (for example, ATLAS.ti or NVivo )

2.8 Focusing on quantitative methods, at a basic level, students are expected to have foundational knowledge of some of the quantitative techniques available, which may include:

- how to develop a questionnaire
- survey sampling
- experimental design (including randomised control trials)
- evaluation methods
- understanding the use of statistical analysis software packages and basic analysis, for example, SPSS or 'R'
- comparing means in statistical analysis
- the distinction between correlation and causation
- how to approach use of secondary data sets
- use and understanding of descriptive and inferential statistics, basic statistical tests (for example, cross-tabs, chi-square).

2.9 At a higher or more advanced level, students would be expected to demonstrate knowledge and possible use of some of the following quantitative techniques:

- T-tests
- ANOVA
- other forms of multi-variate analysis
- systematic reviews
- secondary data and big data
- data mapping
- graphical presentation of statistics data
- online data analysis, for example via social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.

2.10 At a higher or postgraduate level there is also an expectation of knowledge and understanding of both qualitative and quantitative methods, and possible utilisation, of the following in practice:

- computer-assisted personal interviewing
- use of ATLAS.ti or NVivo
- systematic reviews
- virtual ethnography.

2.11 Data analysis: All students should also gain a basic understanding of how qualitative and quantitative data can be mixed. This entails consideration of intra method and inter methods triangulation and data integration, as well as data analysis principles: induction, deduction and abduction. All students should also gain a basic understanding of the different stages of data analysis, such as data reduction, data display, data transformation, data correlation, data consolidation, data comparison and data integration.

2.12 Ethical considerations are fundamental to any research. At all levels, students are expected to have knowledge of what is meant by 'ethics', policy frameworks, the difference between individual, legal and professional ethics, and key codes or statements of ethics utilised by criminologists (for example, the British Society of Criminology's Statement of Ethics, the British Sociological Association's Code of Ethics). Consideration should also be given to issues of power, positionality and reflexivity. Students should show that they can engage in discussion about the value and limitations of codes of ethics. They are also expected to know about the practicalities of applying for ethics approval in their particular institution.

2.13 Some common examples of ethical problems are: interviews which trigger painful experiences; using material without consent; and unconsciously manipulating the direction and content of material so as to produce results/findings which conform to a particular research theory. Students are also expected to be able to consider strategies such as:

- choosing an appropriate research design
- holding fast to the concept of 'informed consent' or 'valid consent'
- maintaining confidentiality
- engaging 'hard to reach' and 'vulnerable' populations and the appropriate research designs and ethical protocols that may be required.

2.14 At the higher and postgraduate levels there is an expectation that students would have increased awareness that these strategies are not straightforward (for example, what is meant by 'appropriate research design', 'autonomy' and 'confidentiality'? Are there situations where confidentiality cannot be guaranteed or where the situation demands the breaking of confidentiality?). There should also be awareness of ways of minimising harm and different ways of safeguarding confidentiality.

2.15 At the higher and postgraduate levels, students are expected to be aware of contextual debates about ethics (for example, are disciplinary codes needed or would a general code suffice?) and to be familiar with details of what the law requires as well as what personal ethics require (including principles within relevant legislation and exemptions for researchers) in line with current data protection legislation.

2.16 In summation, there is an expectation that all students gain an appropriate level of 'ethical literacy' so as to ensure the safety and well-being of research participants.

## Accessibility

2.17 Entry on to a Criminology degree can vary considerably and entry routes include a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds. Moreover, access and foundation year courses enable a greater range of entry routes.

2.18 The principal learning and teaching methods that a Criminology student may experience will depend on the aims and objectives of the course, given the wide range of subject-specific and transferable skills being developed. The creation of a two-tier system that singles out students with additional needs must be avoided, therefore, teaching and assessments may need to be adjusted or tailored to the requirements of individuals to ensure inclusiveness and well-being, different formats should be offered to all students and expectations should be transparent. Reasonable adjustments should be considered for fieldwork to enable all students, where possible, to participate. In addition, all practical efforts should be made to ensure equal access to extracurricular activities such as field trips, placements and volunteering opportunities, given the often hidden costs (including opportunity costs) involved. The timing of religious observances and school holidays may be considered when setting deadlines. It should be remembered that perceptions of assessment may differ according to the cultural and experiential backgrounds of both assessors and their students. Clear and accessible guidance outlining assessment criteria at different stages of the degree should be expected.

## Progression

2.19 At the beginning of a degree in Criminology, students are expected to develop and appreciate an understanding of core theoretical knowledge and develop fundamental study skills. This enables students at subsequent points of the course to strengthen their analytic, interpretative and communication skills and, by graduation, to demonstrate the problem-solving, evaluative and reflective skills intrinsic to the subject and the attributes needed for self-managed, lifelong learning.

2.20 Over the course of a degree with honours (FHEQ level 6; FQHEIS level 10) a Criminology student will progress from one year of study to the next, in line with the regulations and processes for each institution. However, it is expected that each year would see the attainment of certain levels of knowledge, expertise and experience that build towards the final achievement of meeting the threshold-level subject-specific and generic skills listed in this Statement. Upon graduation from an undergraduate degree, it would be expected that a student who had achieved a second-class degree or higher would be capable of, and equipped for, undertaking postgraduate study in Criminology or an associated discipline.

2.21 Joint honours undergraduates will achieve core elements of the specific and generic skills for the subject and will add others according to the subjects covered in joint courses. Additionally, they may explore the overlap between their two subject areas, creating further opportunities for interdisciplinary study.

2.22 In a standard three-year undergraduate honours degree course, students may exit earlier and be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education, a Diploma of Higher Education, or an honours degree depending upon the levels of study completed to a satisfactory standard. Scottish bachelor's degrees with honours are typically designed to include four years of study, which relates to the structure of Scottish primary and secondary education

2.23 As students progress through their course, it is anticipated there will be greater opportunity for specialisation, and higher levels of study should enable students to develop deeper analytical and critical skills. Both core and optional modules will enable students to

develop expertise and focus their learning on particular fields of interest. Opportunities for the formal assessment of students' independent and more specialised study, for example the presentation of a dissertation or research project, will normally occur towards the end of the course and enable students to produce an independent piece of work, which may be empirical, policy-based or theoretical.

## **Flexibility**

2.24 The balance of teaching and learning methods varies between courses according to departmental missions, aims and interests. However, Criminology courses in all higher education providers include a wide, diverse and flexible range of learning and teaching styles.

2.25 As noted above, within most Criminology degree courses there is a requirement that students undertake some form of independent research work, often in the form of project work and/or a dissertation presented in the later stages of the course. This represents an area of the student's learning in which mature and intelligent critical reflection is needed with regard to the potential risks and moral and ethical issues associated with a proposed project.

## **Partnership**

2.26 Criminology as a discipline has the potential to influence crime reduction, prevention and control policies and practices in the UK and abroad.

2.27 Criminologists routinely establish partnerships with local, national and international law enforcement bodies, criminal justice institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to a) enable data collection; b) evaluate existing crime prevention or crime control policies and tactics; and c) disseminate research findings to increase awareness of specific emerging trends and phenomena.

2.28 Criminologists often establish partnerships with police forces, the Ministry of Justice, prisons, probation, youth justice and local government institutions and agencies around the country. Internationally, partnerships with European institutions, such as Europol, or the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, can be developed for the purposes highlighted above.

2.29 NGOs in the UK, such as Women in Prison, Gangsline, Crimestoppers UK, Stop Hate UK, the Ben Kinsella Trust, and Victim Support, among others, often partner with criminology teams for research purposes. Similarly, international NGOs such as the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime or Amnesty International, partner with criminology teams for research purposes.

2.30 Research partnerships, especially at the local level, can also lead to educational partnerships. These can take various forms, such as student placements, final year projects and dissertations mentoring, organisation of field trips and career days, workshops and seminars. Most Criminology courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels will include some form of work-based modules, placement terms or field trips, to encourage students' engagement with the criminal justice professions.

## **Monitoring and review**

2.31 A major feature of academic quality assurance and enhancement at a higher education institution is having in place monitoring and regular review processes for the courses it delivers. Degree-awarding bodies routinely collect and analyse information and

undertake periodic course review according to their own needs. They draw on a range of external reference points, including this Statement, to ensure that their provision aligns with sector norms. Monitoring and evaluation is a periodic assessment of a course, conducted internally or by external independent evaluators. Evaluation uses information from both current and historic monitoring to develop an understanding of student achievement or inform future course planning.

2.32 Externality is an essential component of the quality assurance system in the UK. Higher education providers will use external reviewers as part of periodic review to gain an external perspective on any proposed changes and ensure threshold standards are achieved and content is appropriate for the subject.

2.33 External examination currently in use across the UK higher education sector also helps to ensure consistency in the way academic standards are secured by degree-awarding bodies. Typically, external examiners will be asked to comment on the types, principles and purposes of assessments being offered to students. They will consider the types of modules on offer to students, the outcomes of a cohort and how these compare to similar provision offered within the UK. External examiners produce a report each year and make recommendations for changes to modules and assessments (where appropriate). Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one, can play an important role in supporting external examiners in advising on whether threshold standards are being met in a specific subject area.

2.34 Courses with professional and vocational outcomes may also require evaluation and accreditation from professional and regulatory bodies. These are usually done through a combination of site visits and desk-based reviews.



## **3 Content, structure and delivery**

### **Content**

3.1 Criminology continues to grow and is a very dynamic subject. The subject's theoretical and methodological development reflects the rapid social changes of contemporary society and is responsive to the increasing cross-fertilisation of ideas and methods between the human and social sciences. In its modern form, it is characterised by robust debates over how to:

- conceptualise and explain its subject matter
- put its theories into operation in conducting research
- inform debates over criminal policy; the scope of human rights; the links between criminal, restorative and social justice; and the expanding knowledge bases of risk management, including crime prevention, security and justice-related professions
- develop and enhance its methodological and technical expertise in handling different kinds of qualitative and quantitative data
- manage sensitive ethical issues arising from empirical research.

3.2 Criminology is a theoretical and empirical subject with practical application. At the core of criminology are theoretical debates about a wide range of perspectives. Criminology emphasises the importance both of theoretical work and of a firm evidence base for its theories. It also engages in formal and critical evaluation of concepts of crime, harm, deviance, justice and risk, for instance relating to state crime, crimes of the powerful, international crimes, crime prevention, security and digital crimes. It nurtures lively debate and dialogue between a range of theoretical and methodological perspectives, employing both quantitative and qualitative data in considering the operation and limits to the criminal justice system as an appropriate social reaction, as well as the distribution of crime and processes of criminalisation and victimisation over space and time. It guards against attempts to foreclose this dialogue with the premature creation of theoretical or methodological protocols favouring particular subdisciplines, whether endorsed by state officials, the mass media, criminal justice agencies, private and voluntary sector agencies or by fashions in academic thought.

3.3 Many of criminology's most significant theoretical advances have been made through empirical studies. Criminology also contributes to and benefits from continuous theoretical debates within the social sciences, psychology, law, politics, philosophy and other related subjects. The vitality of criminology requires a continuous interchange between theory, analytic and evaluative research, and attention to debates on methodological challenges in social science research, as well as ethical debates about crime, harm, security and human rights at international, national, regional and local levels.

3.4 Criminology is intrinsically a multidisciplinary subject involving an understanding of contested values in the constitution of 'crime', 'harm', 'criminalisation' and 'victimisation' and the application of criminological knowledge.

### **Teaching and learning**

3.5 Students of Criminology engage with course materials in a variety of ways which may include classroom, online or blended/hybrid learning, independent study, or a mixture of options, full or part-time. Students may have access to a range of resources, both traditional, such as core texts and journals, and complementary, such as online tutorials, streaming services and additional online content provided by publishers. It is important to ensure that these materials are accessible.

3.6 Teaching, learning and assessment strategies in criminology recognise the following.

- a) Criminology is neither purely deductive nor purely descriptive; theorisation needs both to guide the collection of data and to be grounded in evidence. Similarly, interpretation of data has to be guided by theorisation. Students are, therefore, given opportunities to acquire capacities of thinking in both abstract and concrete terms and to relate the two. It is expected that criminological theory is a core, foundational aspect of any Criminology degree.
- b) Bodies of evidence in criminology are often consistent with alternative interpretations embodied in rival theoretical perspectives. Students are required to weigh alternative interpretations in terms of consistency with evidence, logic, fit with other findings and breadth of explanatory power. Therefore, students are provided with opportunities to rehearse and revise their own ideas and where these fit into their own understanding of criminology and the criminal justice system.
- c) Criminology is an ever-evolving discipline and reflects current social, political and public disputes. Therefore, students are provided with opportunities to develop awareness of, and reflect on, their own values and those of their cultural, global and political environment, and an appreciation of how alternative values impact upon rival interpretations of evidence. Learning, teaching and assessment approaches within criminology should enable students to engage with these social, political and public disputes, and offer opportunities to apply criminological knowledge to contemporary crime problems.
- d) Criminology attracts students from diverse academic and social backgrounds; their learning and skills development needs vary accordingly. To reflect this, degree courses need to provide flexible and varied teaching, learning and assessment strategies to ensure that all students have as equal an opportunity as possible to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to graduate in Criminology. Where possible, criminological learning, teaching and assessment approaches should be designed to be as inclusive as possible to remove the need for alternative assessment. Alongside this, all involved in the delivery of learning, teaching and assessment within criminology should recognise the emotive nature of much of criminology, and the challenges and impact of engaging with potentially distressing content.

3.7 Teaching and learning in criminology take place in several different educational environments, for example lectures; seminars and workshops; tutorials; independent study; work experience placements/internships; blended or online learning environments; computer/IT workshops; fieldwork and/or observation of the working of the criminal justice system.

## **Assessment**

3.8 Assessment is a crucial component for student learning, progression and personal development. It is necessary to monitor student progress, motivate learning, provide 'feed forward' feedback, and to grade students in line with the appropriate assessment criteria. As noted earlier, reasonable adjustments may need to be made to assessment to ensure inclusivity. Course teams should monitor student outcomes and reflect on assessment strategies - for example, monitor by protected characteristics to ensure there are no unintended outcomes.

3.9 Methods of assessment take account of, as a minimum:

- progression within the undergraduate course
- a combination of the assessment of both knowledge and competencies
- enabling students to demonstrate their level of attainment and to demonstrate their full range of abilities and skills
- varied formative and summative aspects
- reflection of alignment of the desired learning outcomes for the course and modules within it.

3.10 Modules within a Criminology course should be scaffolded to enable students to build on previous learning as they progress through their course.

## 4 Benchmark standards

### Introduction

4.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Criminology. Demonstrating these standards over time will show that a student has achieved the range of knowledge, understanding and skills expected of graduates in Criminology.

4.2 Students are assessed against their curricula of study, which should allow them to achieve the required learning outcomes and to develop and demonstrate characteristics associated with the higher level of learning of a bachelor's degree with honours. At the most fundamental level, each classification means that students have achieved the characteristics of Level 6 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Level 10 in Scotland of the respective qualification frameworks.

4.3 The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold standards. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be. For Criminology degree courses this will include:

- knowledge and understanding
- cognitive skills
- practical skills
- transferable skills.

4.4 In this Subject Benchmark Statement, expectations for an honours graduate in Criminology at threshold level (3rd class), typical level (2:2 or 2:1) and excellent level (1st class) are provided.

4.5 For further details of typical expectations at each outcome classification, including for knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, practical skills, transferable skills and professional competencies (if appropriate), please consult [Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees](#).

### Criminology subject-specific expectations

Threshold level (3rd class)	Typical level (2:2 and 2:1)	Excellent level (1st class)
A graduate of an honours degree course covered by this Subject Benchmark Statement should be able to:	A typical level graduate of an honours degree course covered by this Subject Benchmark Statement should be able to:	An excellent level graduate of an honours degree course covered by this Subject Benchmark Statement should be able to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• describe and examine a range of key concepts and theoretical approaches within criminology, and to evaluate their application</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• describe and critically examine a range of key concepts and theoretical approaches within criminology, and to evaluate their application</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• describe and critically examine to an exceptional level a range of key concepts and theoretical approaches within criminology, and to evaluate their application</li></ul>

Threshold level (3rd class)	Typical level (2:2 and 2:1)	Excellent level (1st class)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assess political and social processes of victimisation and criminalisation in light of criminological theories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• critically assess political and social processes of victimisation and criminalisation in light of criminological theories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide exceptional critical assessment of political and social processes of victimisation and criminalisation in light of criminological theories</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide an account of social diversity and inequality and their effects in relation to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation and responses to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide a critical understanding of social diversity and inequality and their effects in relation to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation and responses to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate an exceptional critical understanding of social diversity and inequality and their effects in relation to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation and responses to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluate criminal justice agency practices and developments in terms of changing values and relationships between individuals, groups, and public and private agencies in different locations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• critically evaluate criminal justice agency practices and developments in terms of changing values and relationships between individuals, groups, and public and private agencies in different locations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• critically evaluate to an exceptional level criminal justice agency practices and developments in terms of changing values and relationships between individuals, groups, and public and private agencies in different locations</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• examine the values, practices and processes of governance, risk management and human rights that underpin the treatment of lawbreakers within UK criminal justice systems and allied agencies which administer sentencing and alternatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• critically assess the values, practices and processes of governance, risk management and human rights that underpin the treatment of lawbreakers within UK criminal justice systems and allied agencies which administer sentencing and alternatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate exceptional critical assessment of the values, practices and processes of governance, risk management and human rights that underpin the treatment of lawbreakers within UK criminal justice systems and allied agencies which administer sentencing and alternatives</li> </ul>

Threshold level (3rd class)	Typical level (2:2 and 2:1)	Excellent level (1st class)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• apply conceptions of human rights in order to evaluate efforts to prevent harm and ensure personal safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide a critical understanding of and apply conceptions of human rights in order to critically evaluate efforts to prevent harm and ensure personal safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide an exceptional critical understanding of and application of conceptions of human rights in order to critically evaluate efforts to prevent harm and ensure personal safety</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use a range of research strategies and methods, assess the appropriateness of their use, and identify an appropriate strategy for specific research problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use a range of research strategies and methods, critically assess the appropriateness of their use, and identify an appropriate strategy for specific research problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accurately use a range of research strategies and methods, provide exceptional critical assessment of the appropriateness of their use, and consistently identify an appropriate strategy for specific research problems</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the use of comparison in relation to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation and responses to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• critically evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the use of comparison in relation to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation and responses to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• critically evaluate to an exceptional level strengths and weaknesses in the use of comparison in relation to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation and responses to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• summarise and analyse quantitative and qualitative empirical data about crime, harm, deviance and victimisation and responses to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation, in order to evaluate competing criminological theories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• summarise and critically analyse quantitative and qualitative empirical data about crime, harm, deviance and victimisation and responses to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation, in order to critically evaluate competing criminological theories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide exceptional summary and critical analysis of quantitative and qualitative empirical data about crime, harm, deviance and victimisation and responses to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation, in order to critically evaluate competing criminological theories</li> </ul>

Threshold level (3rd class)	Typical level (2:2 and 2:1)	Excellent level (1st class)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain and evaluate complex social problems in terms of criminological theories of crime, class, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain and critically evaluate complex social problems in terms of criminological theories of crime, class, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide exceptional critical explanation and evaluation of complex social problems in terms of criminological theories of crime, class, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>analyse ways in which the subject of criminology can be distinguished from other forms of understanding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>critically analyse ways in which the subject of criminology can be distinguished from other forms of understanding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrate exceptional critical analysis of ways in which the subject of criminology can be distinguished from other forms of understanding.</li> </ul>

## Benchmark standard for postgraduate degrees

4.6 The following describes the threshold standards for a postgraduate degree in Criminology, which are in addition to those for a bachelor's degree with honours. The holder of a master's degree in Criminology should be able to demonstrate:

- a systematic understanding and critical awareness of topics which are informed by the subject of criminology
- a critical awareness of the history of ideas, the cultural context, and the social and political theories that inform and influence the practice of criminology
- a critical awareness of the intersectionality of power in relation to criminal justice agencies and responses to crime, harm, deviance and victimisation
- an ability to identify appropriate methodologies for dealing with complex problems and to design their own research project
- an ability to develop critical discussion and analysis of complex concepts, and work independently and with some originality
- an ability to successfully complete a substantial empirical research project, systematic review or systematic case study, informed by wide current understandings in the subject.

## **5 Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Criminology**

### **Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Criminology (2022)**

Professor Mark Simpson (Chair)	Teesside University
Dr Linda Asquith	Leeds Beckett University
Dr Michelle Butler	Queen's University Belfast
Dr Neil Casey	QAA Officer
Dr Bankole Cole	British Society of Criminology
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QAA would like to thank Professor Elizabeth Cleaver, Professor Michael McLinden and the Disabled Students' Commission for their valued contributions to the development of the Statement.

### **Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Criminology (2019)**

The third edition, published in 2019, was revised by QAA to align the content with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published in 2018. Proposed revisions were checked and verified by one of the members of the Subject Benchmark Statement review group for Criminology from 2014.

Professor Mark Simpson	Teesside University
Dr Alison Felce	QAA



## **Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Criminology (2014)**

Details below appear as published in the second edition of the Subject Benchmark Statement.

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Employer feedback	South Wales Police
	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
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## **Membership of the original benchmarking group for Criminology (2007)**

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Fourth edition

Published - 30 March 2022

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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