



Subject Benchmark Statement: Criminology

The Basics

This document is a summary of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Criminology. It is specifically designed to provide a short and accessible overview of the main Statement for students, employers and academics. It is not intended to replace or alter the Subject Benchmark Statement, which should be referred to in the design and approval of courses and when any further detail is required.

Subject Benchmark Statements describe the nature of study and the benchmark academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and in respect of particular qualifications. They provide a picture of what graduates in a particular subject might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their course or programme.

Subject Benchmark Statements are presented in four sections. Section 1 outlines the contextual information - providing the operational landscape, and boundaries, of subject discipline. This includes consideration of the ways in which the discipline addresses wider social goals, specifically in relation to: equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); the requirements of disabled students; education for sustainable development (ESD); and enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Section 2 covers distinctive features of the course, including curriculum design, partnership arrangements, flexibility of delivery, progression and ongoing monitoring processes. Section 3 explains any features relevant to teaching, learning and assessment activities for the subject. Section 4 describes the benchmark standards of achievement reached by all graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours in the subject, with some subjects also including achievement at master's level.



Why study a degree in Criminology?

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.

As a subject discipline, criminology is a constantly evolving field in which new areas of enquiry may be informed by changing political, economic and social concerns, or by changes within other subjects such as sociology, social policy, law, politics or philosophy. The core of the subject area, however, remains relatively constant.

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 placement opportunities, which relate to sustainability of both educational development and the discipline within and beyond the academic realm.



What are the main teaching and learning approaches in criminology?

Teaching, learning and assessment styles in the discipline are diverse and 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.

Teaching, learning and assessment strategies in Criminology degrees recognise the following:

- criminology is neither purely deductive nor purely descriptive
- bodies of evidence in criminology are often consistent with alternative interpretations embodied in rival theoretical perspectives
- criminology is an ever-evolving discipline and reflects current social, political and public disputes.



How are students assessed?

Assessment is a crucial component for student learning, progression and personal development. The assessment of Criminology courses includes a mix of methods that are accessible to disabled students and students from varying educational and cultural backgrounds within different learning situations. Where individual students may be disadvantaged by particular assessment methods, adjustments to those assessments are considered, while ensuring fairness across the full cohort. Where possible, criminological learning, teaching and assessment approaches should be designed to be as inclusive as possible to remove the need for alternative assessment.

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



Benchmark Standards

The minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Criminology are outlined on **pages 18–21** of the Subject Benchmark Statement. 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 and should refer to [Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees](#). This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours: 1st, 2:1, 2:2 and 3rd. Study at master's level requires higher level skills, with students expected to achieve according to the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7 on the FHEQ and SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS.

The Statement was developed by a group of subject experts drawn from across the sector. Details of the Advisory Group can be found on **page 22** of the Statement.

Read the full Subject Benchmark Statement

The [full Subject Benchmark Statement](#) is available on the QAA website.



Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as a membership organisation on behalf of the higher education sector.

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