



# UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Part A: Setting and maintaining  
academic standards

**Subject benchmark statement**  
**Criminology**

March 2014

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## How can I use this document?

This document is a 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.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of programmes of study in criminology or related subjects
- a prospective student thinking about studying criminology, or a current student of the subject, to find out what may be involved
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of a graduate in criminology.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this subject benchmark statement can be found in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) glossary.<sup>1</sup> QAA has also published a general guide to quality assurance in higher education.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The QAA glossary is available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary).

<sup>2</sup> A general guide to quality assurance can be found at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/what-is-quality](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/what-is-quality).

## About subject benchmark statements

Subject benchmark statements form part of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) which sets out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education reviewed by QAA are required to meet.<sup>3</sup> They are a component of *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards*, which includes the Expectation that higher education providers 'consider and take account of relevant subject benchmark statements' in order to secure threshold academic standards.<sup>4</sup>

Subject benchmark statements describe the nature of study and the 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 programme of study.

Subject benchmark statements are used as reference points in the design, delivery and review of academic programmes. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme 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 programme design within a framework agreed by the subject community. Further guidance about programme design, development and approval, learning and teaching, assessment of students, and programme monitoring and review is available in *Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality* of the Quality Code in the following Chapters:<sup>5</sup>

- *Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval*
- *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*
- *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning*
- *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review.*

For some subject areas, higher education providers may need to consider other reference points in addition to the subject benchmark statement in designing, delivering and reviewing programmes. These may include requirements set out by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, national occupational standards and industry or employer expectations. In such cases, the subject benchmark statement may provide additional guidance around academic standards not covered by these requirements.<sup>6</sup> The relationship between academic and professional or regulatory requirements is made clear within individual statements, but it is the responsibility of individual higher education providers to decide how they use this information. The responsibility for academic standards remains with the higher education provider who awards the degree.

Subject benchmark statements are written and maintained by subject specialists drawn from and acting on behalf of the subject community. The process is facilitated by QAA. In order to ensure the continuing currency of subject benchmark statements, QAA initiates regular reviews of their content, five years after first publication, and every seven years subsequently.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode). The Quality Code aligns with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Area*, available at: [www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/](http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/).

<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/Quality-Code-Part-A.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/Quality-Code-Part-A.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> Individual Chapters are available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/Quality-Code-Part-B.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/Quality-Code-Part-B.aspx).

<sup>6</sup> See further Quality Code, *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Quality-Code-Part-A.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Quality-Code-Part-A.aspx).

## **Relationship to legislation**

Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them, for example by funding bodies. The Quality Code does not interpret legislation nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements. Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the subject benchmark statement where appropriate. Higher education providers are responsible for how they use these resources.<sup>7</sup>

## **Equality and diversity**

The Quality Code embeds consideration of equality and diversity matters throughout. Promoting equality involves treating everyone with equal dignity and worth, while also raising aspirations and supporting achievement for people with diverse requirements, entitlements and backgrounds. An inclusive environment for learning anticipates the varied requirements of learners, and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Higher education providers, staff and students all have a role in, and responsibility for, promoting equality.

Equality of opportunity involves enabling access for people who have differing individual requirements as well as eliminating arbitrary and unnecessary barriers to learning. In addition, disabled students and non-disabled students are offered learning opportunities that are equally accessible to them, by means of inclusive design wherever possible and by means of reasonable individual adjustments wherever necessary.

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<sup>7</sup> See further the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education: General Introduction*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Quality-Code-introduction.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Quality-Code-introduction.aspx).

## About this subject benchmark statement

This subject benchmark statement refers to bachelor's degrees with honours and master's degrees in criminology.<sup>8</sup>

This version of the statement forms its second edition, following initial publication in 2007.<sup>9</sup>

### Note on alignment with higher education sector coding systems

Criminology is an area of study which had no code(s) at all in Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) 2.0. Analysis of the Higher Education Statistics Agency data and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service course codes suggested that higher education providers offering courses in criminology used a range of codes in both L Social science and M Law, often reflecting the department in which the courses were based. JACS 3.0 made provision for specific codes in criminology.

Programmes of study which use this subject benchmark statement as a reference point are generally classified under the following codes: L311, L312, L611, L437, L253, L541, M270, N225, V324.<sup>10</sup>

### Summary of changes from the previous subject benchmark statement (2007)

The subject benchmark statement as revised in 2014 has been organised so as to simplify and shorten its presentation and also to allow the possibility of amending the content periodically, as the subject develops over time, to keep pace with theoretical developments, as well as changes in practice and policy. Key changes from the previous version include greater consideration given to the issue of ethical practice and standards, greater attention to the methodological skills required to work with quantitative and qualitative empirical data about crime, and use of technologies of data retrieval, evaluation and analysis.

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<sup>8</sup> Bachelor's degrees are at level 6 in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2008) and level 10 in the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (2001), and master's degrees are at level 7 and level 11 respectively.

<sup>9</sup> Further information is available in the *Recognition scheme for subject benchmark statements*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Recognition-scheme-for-subject-benchmark-statements.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Recognition-scheme-for-subject-benchmark-statements.aspx).

<sup>10</sup> Further information about JACS is available at: [www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1776/649/](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1776/649/).

# 1 Introduction

1.1 This subject benchmark 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 subject benchmark statement, including the professional body for criminology in the UK, the British Society of Criminology (see paragraphs 1.4-1.5). 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.

1.2 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 master's 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 master's degrees are set out in section 8). 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.

1.3 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.<sup>11</sup>

1.4 The British Society of Criminology is a registered charity and a registered company. It is the only organisation representing professionals in the area of criminology in the UK, representing the broad field of criminology and criminal justice and related subjects. At the time of writing, nearly half of the Society's membership works in higher education as lecturers or full-time researchers, while almost another third are postgraduate research students. A further one-sixth work in areas relating to the criminal justice system as practitioners, administrators, policy makers or researchers, while the remainder are retired or other interested persons. The Society represents both producers and users of the subject of criminology. The Society's Constitution ensures wide representation on the Executive Committee which is itself elected by the membership. The Society is a member of the Academy of Social Sciences, to which it nominates academicians from time to time. Because of its open and democratic structure, the Society is in a strong position to understand and represent the educational and professional needs of criminology. The Society offers unique opportunities for researchers in the field to engage with others through its annual conference

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<sup>11</sup> *Economic and Social Research Council Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines 2009*, available at: [www.esrc.ac.uk/images/postgraduate\\_training\\_and\\_development\\_guidelines\\_tcm8-2660.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/postgraduate_training_and_development_guidelines_tcm8-2660.pdf).

(including a postgraduate pre-conference meeting), specialist networks, and branch/regional seminars.

1.5 The British Society of Criminology, as a professional organisation, has a code of ethics<sup>12</sup> to guide the behaviour of its members and provides an ongoing consultation service for its members or any interested person. The code of ethics does not seek to impose a single model of ethical practice, but is a frame of reference to encourage good ethical practice and, in keeping with the aims of the Society, to challenge questionable practice in carrying out research, publishing or otherwise furthering the cause of criminology. The guidance does not provide prescriptive responses for the resolution of choices or dilemmas surrounding professional conduct in specific circumstances. It provides a framework of principles to assist with decision making as well as highlighting principles, values and interests of all those involved in a particular situation. The code of ethics is reviewed at regular intervals to take account of new debates and considerations in criminology. Such reviews reflect new directions within the subject (for example, cultural criminology, cybercrime and zemiology) and changes within the broader social scientific field within which criminology falls. These may require new ways of thinking about ethics, research integrity, research practice and research misconduct. Overall, the guidance seeks to provide a critical appreciation of ethical practice in relation to research within the broad field of criminology.

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<sup>12</sup> *The British Society of Criminology Code of Ethics*, available at: <http://britsoccrim.org/docs/CodeofEthics.pdf>.



## 2 Defining principles

2.1 The purposes of this subject benchmark statement are:

- to enable students to understand what the subject entails and to choose a programme appropriate for their personal career plans
- to enable employers and other stakeholders to understand what knowledge and skills can be expected from graduates in the subjects which fall under this subject benchmark statement
- to assist higher education providers in designing, developing and approving new programmes in criminology, criminal justice and related degrees
- to assist providers of criminology programmes who wish to develop or amend their programmes
- to assist external examiners and academic reviewers in confirming and comparing standards
- to facilitate European and other international collaborative teaching programmes.

2.2 This subject benchmark statement sets out threshold standards for honours degrees in criminology at bachelor's or first degree level and for master's degrees. The statement should be regarded as representing general expectations about standards within the subject. It is intended to encourage collaborative relationships between the areas of interest to which the benchmark statement applies, and also within the social sciences more generally.

2.3 This subject benchmark statement focuses on programmes where criminology is the sole area of study. The structure of individual degree programmes is determined by the higher education provider. Consequently, the point in the programme at which subject knowledge and skills are achieved may vary, though the substance of the programme as a whole reflects this statement. Criminology may also be studied in combination with other subjects. The choice of areas to cover in combined and joint programmes varies from provider to provider, depending on factors such as the subject with which criminology is combined, the concerns of designated employers and the research profile of teaching staff.

2.4 Notwithstanding the above, all programmes including the study of criminology, whether on its own or in combination with another subject, enable students to develop a critical understanding of:

- the major theories which are deployed throughout the social sciences that seek to explain the social and personal context of all aspects of crime, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance
- key concepts and theoretical approaches that have been developed, and are continuing to develop, in relation to crime, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance
- the basic principles of social research as applicable to criminological topics
- how to conduct research and analysis of findings
- what can be achieved by different quantitative and qualitative methodologies and techniques
- when a particular methodology or technique is most appropriately used
- how the results or research findings of any particular study may be evaluated
- the ethical principles governing criminological research
- the principles of human rights and civil liberties which are applicable to the different stages of the criminal justice process, and to all official responses to crime and deviance

- the dimensions of social divisions and social diversity in relation to criminological topics
- the construction and influence of representations of crime and victims, and of responses to crime and deviance, as found in official reports, the mass media and public opinion
- the local, national and international contexts of crime, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance.

2.5 Criminologists may be employed in a range of different academic departments. Therefore, this subject benchmark statement specifies only the teaching to be provided and the learning required from the student. There are no prescriptions as to the provider's arrangements for delivery of subject matter, and cooperation between subjects and departments within and between subject boundaries is generally regarded as beneficial.

2.6 The benchmark statement does not specify teaching and learning policies or methods, as these will be designed to suit the programme, the staff experience and the student body of each higher education provider. Similarly, there are no recommendations as to modes of assessment. Examiners, providers and external examiners are expected, in general, to tailor assessment to a demonstration of achievement of the required learning outcome. Some more general guidance on teaching, learning and assessment is indicated in section 6.

### 3 Nature and extent of criminology

3.1 Criminology draws on a wide range of human and social science disciplines. 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 crime control policy; the scope of human rights; the links between criminal and social justice; and the expanding knowledge bases of crime prevention, security and justice-related professions
- develop and enhance its methodological and technical expertise in handling different kinds of data (including large data sets ('big data'), open data and internet data)
- manage sensitive ethical issues arising from empirical research (including specific issues emerging from internet research).

3.2 Criminology is both a theoretical and empirical subject. At the heart 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 and deviance, including state crime, crimes of the powerful, crime prevention, security, and crime control policies, as well as other responses to crime and deviance. However, in furthering these values, it nurtures a lively debate and dialogue between a range of theoretical and methodological perspectives, employing both quantitative and qualitative data in considering 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 sub-disciplines, whether endorsed by state officials, the mass media, criminal justice agencies, private and voluntary sector agencies or by fashions in academic thought.

3.3 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, deviance and stigmatised differences
- causes and organisation of crime and deviance at individual, group, family, community, institutional and state levels
- practical and political processes of preventing and managing crime
- understanding the intersectionality of deviance and crime in relation to: class, gender, race and ethnicity, religious faith and sexuality
- official and unofficial responses to crime, deviance, and social and/or environmental harm
- representations of crime, 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.

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

3.4 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, philosophy and other related

subjects. The vitality of criminology also requires a continuous interchange between theory and analytic and evaluative research, as well as attention to increasingly salient ethical debates about crime, security and human rights at international, national, regional and local levels.

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

## 4 Subject knowledge and understanding

4.1 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. Such new areas of enquiry may also be generated by changing political and social concerns, or by changes within other subjects such as sociology, law or philosophy. In spite of this constant production of new knowledge, however, the broad outlines of the subject area remain relatively constant.

4.2 Criminology includes knowledge and understanding of the following issues:

- the development of criminology as a distinct area of study and inquiry, and its multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary nature
- alternative theoretical approaches within criminology, and contemporary debates about the content and scope of criminology
- how crime, deviance and victimisation are socially and legally constructed
- the different sources of information about crime 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
- different theoretical and empirical approaches to the study, analysis and explanation of crime, deviance, harm and victimisation
- theoretical and empirical relationships between power, crime and social change, and the impact of globalisation
- relationships of crime, deviance and offending, and victimisation to social divisions such as: age, gender, sexuality, social class, race, ethnicity and religious faith
- the development, role, organisation and governance of efforts to reduce and prevent crime, deviance and harm, and to ensure personal and public safety and security in different locations; the role of the state and non-governmental agencies
- the effectiveness of such measures, and human rights issues in relation to preventive and pre-emptive measures
- the social and historical development of the main institutions involved in crime control in different locations
- the philosophy and politics of criminalisation, victimisation, criminal justice and modes of punishment
- the use of discretion in relation to justice processes, including issues of discrimination and diversity
- governance of criminal and youth justice, and other crime control processes
- 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 and deviance, and of the main agents and institutions which respond to crime and deviance, 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 safety and security, crime

control, 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
- how to use empirical evidence - both quantitative and qualitative - about the distribution of crime, deviance, offending and victimisation of all kinds to explore relationships between these and social divisions and social change.

## 5 Subject-specific skills and other skills

5.1 Students of criminology at honours degree level are expected to develop a range of transferable skills that will enable them to work autonomously both as students and in subsequent employment.

5.2 The study of criminology enables students to develop a number of cognitive abilities and skills. These may be acquired in a range of teaching and learning situations, so that students will be able to become competent in:

- locating, retrieving, managing and analysing appropriate secondary data and evidence
- describing, summarising and interpreting quantitative data
- reporting the results of quantitative and qualitative analyses, including using appropriate graphical methods
- generating and evaluating evidence
- taking account of the complexity and diversity of the ways in which crime is constituted, represented and dealt with
- assessing the merits of competing theories relevant to crime, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance
- assessing the merits and diversity of objectives of competing responses to crime, deviance and harm, including the protection of human rights
- assessing how public criminology translates into policy
- gathering, retrieving and synthesising data and information
- making ethical judgements about methods and published research
- making reasoned arguments
- using computer-based technologies
- working collaboratively
- interpreting quantitative data
- interpreting qualitative evidence and texts
- developing the ability to reflect in critical and constructive ways on their own learning.

5.3 The range of subject-specific abilities that students would normally be expected to develop during their undergraduate programme include:

- identifying criminological problems, formulate questions and investigate them
- using criminological theory and concepts to understand the role of power in defining crime, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance
- using criminological theory to elucidate representations of crime and victimisation, and responses to these, as presented in the traditional and new media and in official reports
- using empirical evidence about crime, victimisation and responses to crime to evaluate and elaborate criminological theory
- explaining complex social problems in terms of criminological theory
- analysing, assessing and communicating quantitative and qualitative empirical information about crime, victimisation, responses to crime and deviance, and representations of crime
- identifying human rights issues in responses to crime, deviance and harm
- recognising a range of ethical problems associated with research and taking action in accordance with the guidelines of ethical practice developed by the British Society of Criminology and cognate professional bodies

- identifying and deploying a range of research strategies, including qualitative and quantitative methods and the use of electronic and published data sources
- selecting and applying appropriate strategies for specific research problems
- presenting the philosophical and methodological background of one's own research and the research of others.

5.4 Many of the technical skills which criminology students will acquire are generic to all social sciences. These include:

- written and oral communication skills, including the clear presentation of research procedures, academic debates and the student's own arguments
- time planning and management
- working productively in a group
- presenting data and evidence in an appropriate format for a variety of audiences
- formulating researchable problems within a general area of concern
- evaluating evidence of diverse kinds and drawing appropriate conclusions
- research design and data collection skills in relation to crime, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance, such as:
  - questionnaire design
  - understanding and using survey documentation to locate and understand survey data
  - knowledge of survey, experimental and case study design
  - online analysis of survey data
  - identification of an appropriate sampling method
  - interview methodologies
  - focus groups
  - visual methods
  - ethnography
  - evaluation methods
- critical use of published data sources
- data analysis, including indexing and retrieval of qualitative data
- use and understanding of descriptive and inferential statistics (including summary measures, measures of association and significance, contingency tables and knowledge of the use and value of appropriate learning technologies), and awareness of the use and potential misuse of statistics
- distinguishing between experimental and observational knowledge, between correlation and causation, and the importance of controlling for prior variables when analysing and discussing association
- identifying the most important arguments or evidence in a text and recording and/or representing these
- bibliographic and referencing skills: the identification of relevant published and web-based materials in relation to a particular topic
- computing skills in relation both to text and the presentation of basic research data.



## 6 Teaching, learning and assessment

6.1 Students studying criminology have access to a range of supportive learning resources. These include academic staff who are themselves actively engaged in criminological research activities; a range of paper and electronic resources such as texts, monographs and journals; and computing resources including hardware, software and the necessary technical support. At the beginning of an honours programme in criminology, the emphasis will normally be on developing basic research, information retrieval and study skills. This enables students at subsequent points of the programme 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. It is anticipated that there will be greater opportunities for students to pursue more specialist courses as they move through their programme of study. Opportunities for the formal assessment of students' independent and more specialised study, for example the presentation of a dissertation, will normally occur towards the end of the programme.

6.2 Teaching, learning and assessment strategies in criminology take account of the Quality Code, published by QAA,<sup>13</sup> and recognise the following.

- 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.
- 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.
- Criminology is a contested and often contentious subject which is very likely to reflect current social, political and public disputes. Therefore, students are provided with opportunities to develop awareness of their own values and those of their cultural and political environment, and an appreciation of how alternative values impact upon rival interpretations of evidence.
- Criminology attracts students from diverse academic and social backgrounds; their learning and skills development needs vary accordingly. To reflect this, degree programmes need to provide flexible and varied teaching, learning and assessment strategies in order to ensure that all students have as equal an opportunity as possible to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to graduate in criminology.

6.3 Teaching and learning in criminology takes place in a number of different contexts, for example lectures; seminars and workshops; tutorials; independent study; work experience placements/internships; blended or e-learning environments; computer/IT workshops; fieldwork and/or observation of the working of the criminal justice system.

6.4 Work experience placements, internships or voluntary work in relevant agencies and organisations may be offered. They provide students with the opportunity to engage with the applied nature of criminology, as well as enhancing employability and 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

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<sup>13</sup> Information on the UK Quality Code for Higher Education is available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode).

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.

6.5 Assessment is a crucial component of student learning. It is necessary to monitor student progress, motivate learning, provide feedback, and to grade students. Methods of assessment take account of the Quality Code, in particular *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning*<sup>14</sup> and therefore, among other things:

- reflect progression within the undergraduate programme
- combine the assessment of both knowledge and skills
- enable students to demonstrate their level of attainment and to demonstrate their full range of abilities and skills
- are varied and include formative and summative aspects
- reflect alignment of the desired learning outcomes for the programme and modules within it.

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<sup>14</sup> Quality Code, *Chapter B6*, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B6.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/quality-code-B6.aspx).

## **7 Benchmark standards for honours degrees**

7.1 The benchmark statement standards for criminology may be achieved in a number of ways and are compatible with a diversity of curricula and a variety of modes of assessment. Thus, it is not assumed that the subject benchmark statement necessarily maps on to specific modules or units within a programme of study.

7.2 The following standards represent the threshold expectations in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities of a graduate of criminology at honours degree level in the UK. The threshold benchmark standards of achievement which will be reached by those gaining a master's degree are listed separately in section 8.

### **Subject knowledge and understanding**

7.3 A graduate of an honours degree programme covered by this benchmark statement should be able to:

- describe and examine a range of key concepts and theoretical approaches within criminology, and to evaluate their application
- appraise critically political and social processes of victimisation and criminalisation in light of criminological theories
- provide an analytical account of social diversity and inequality and their effects in relation to crime, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance
- 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
- examine critically the values, practices and processes of governance, including human rights, that underpin the treatment of lawbreakers within UK criminal justice systems, and allied agencies which administer sentencing and alternatives
- apply conceptions of human rights in order to evaluate efforts to prevent harm and ensure personal safety
- use a range of research strategies and methods, assess the appropriateness of their use, and identify an appropriate strategy for specific research problems
- evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the use of comparison in relation to crime, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance
- summarise and analyse quantitative and qualitative empirical data about crime, victimisation and responses to crime, in order to evaluate competing criminological theories
- explain and evaluate complex social problems in terms of criminological theories of crime, class, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance
- analyse ways in which the subject of criminology can be distinguished from other forms of understanding.

## **Cognitive abilities and skills**

7.4 A graduate of an honours degree programme covered by this benchmark statement should have the cognitive abilities to:

- assess a range of perspectives and discuss the strengths of each for the understanding of crime and victimisation
- assess the values and practices of the key agencies which administer responses to crime and deviance
- draw on materials from a range of sources and synthesise them
- design and use appropriate research strategies for data collection using quantitative and qualitative methods
- apply statistical techniques and methods
- distinguish between traditional and non-traditional (transgressive) research practices
- draw on relevant evidence to evaluate competing explanations
- evaluate the viability of competing explanations within criminology and draw logical and appropriate conclusions.

## **Subject-specific skills**

7.5 A graduate of an honours degree programme covered by this benchmark statement should have the subject-specific skills to:

- formulate and investigate criminological questions
- summarise and explain empirical information and research findings about crime, victimisation and responses to crime and deviance
- assess the methodology used to address criminological questions
- apply basic research tools appropriately in relation to theoretically driven, exploratory or evaluative research
- access or gather appropriate qualitative or quantitative information to address criminological questions in relation to crime, victimisation, responses to crime and deviance, and representations of these, using qualitative and quantitative methods
- recognise the ethical implications of research into criminological questions and identify appropriate solutions
- discuss criminological topics with an appreciation of criminological theory, of evidence, and of the relevance to current debates, and present the conclusions in a variety of appropriate academic formats
- comment on the value of criminological work on crime, victimisation, responses to crime and deviance, and representations of these in relation to policy questions at national, international and global levels.

## 8 Benchmark standard for master's degrees

8.1 The following describes the threshold standards for a master's degree in criminology, which are in addition to those for a bachelor's degree with honours.

8.2 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 forefront of 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, law and order
- an ability to develop a critical discussion and analysis of power (for example in relation to gender relations)
- an ability to identify appropriate methodologies for dealing with complex problems
- an ability to develop critical discussion and analysis of complex concepts, and work independently and with some originality
- an ability successfully to complete a substantial empirical research project, systematic review or systematic case study, informed by wide current understandings in the subject.

## **Appendix A: Membership of the benchmarking and review groups for the subject benchmark statement for criminology**

### **Membership of the review group for the subject benchmark statement for criminology (2014)**

Dr John Craig	Higher Education Academy
Professor Loraine Gelsthorpe	Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge
Dr Nic Groombridge	St Mary's University College
Dr Helen Jones (Chair)	Higher Education Academy
Professor Andrew Millie	Edge Hill University
Dr Mark Simpson	Teesside University
Dr Natasha Taylor	Higher Education Academy
Professor Azrini Wahidin	Nottingham Trent University
<b>Student reader</b>	
Heulyn Greenslade	University of South Wales
<b>Employer feedback</b>	
South Wales Police	
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner Gloucestershire	

## Membership of the original benchmarking group for criminology (2007)

Details below appear as published in the original subject benchmark statement.

Dr Maureen Cain (Chair)	University of Birmingham
Professor Hazel Croall	University of Strathclyde
Colin Dunnighan	Formerly of University of Teesside
Professor Gordon Hughes	Then of Open University, now of Cardiff University
Dr Mike Nash	University of Portsmouth
Professor Tim Newburn	London School of Economics and Political Science
Professor Kevin Stenson	Then of Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, now of Middlesex University
Maggie Sumner	University of Westminster
Stephen Tong	Canterbury Christ Church University
Dr Azrini Wahidin	Then of University of Kent, now of University of Central England in Birmingham
<b>In association with:</b> Professor Mike Neary	Centre for Learning and Teaching in Sociology, Anthropology and Politics
<b>Secretary to the committee:</b> Alison Wagstaff	University of Birmingham

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