

# BRIDGING CONNECTIONS:

A HEFCE CATALYST FUNDED PROJECT  
BY LANCASTER AND KEELE UNIVERSITIES

IMPROVING THE LINKS BETWEEN  
ACADEMIC AND WORK-RELATED LEARNING  
FOR CRIMINOLOGY STUDENTS

HIGHER EDUCATION  
*hefce*  
FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND

Keele  
UNIVERSITY 

# PROJECT DETAILS

*This pedagogic research  
captured and used  
learner analytics to  
develop innovative  
pedagogical tools*

The QAA (2014) benchmarks for Criminology suggest that the applied nature of Criminology can enhance employability and transferable skills. Yet, there is little systematic understanding of how, or even whether, students relate criminological concepts to their practice-related learning. This innovative collaborative project between Lancaster and Keele Universities, funded by a 2016 Hefce Catalyst Fund grant, investigated whether, how and in what ways criminology students apply their academic knowledge to work-related learning.

The overall aim of the project was to use learner analytics to develop innovative pedagogical tools that support students in recognizing, reflecting on, articulating and applying criminological knowledge to their experiences in WRL modules.

## METHODOLOGY

98 current and former criminology students from Lancaster and Keele universities completed an online survey, that informed face-to-face interviews (n=17) and focus groups (n=26) with current and former students. Full ethical approval was granted by Lancaster University.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

How do students successfully apply their criminological knowledge to work-related learning?

## AUTHENTICITY AND EXPERIENCE

**When they apply their knowledge to authentic 'real world' examples (experiential learning; see definitions)** - Students identified the importance of an authentic experience where they apply their criminological knowledge to real world problems. For example, at Lancaster University students on the Criminology Innovations Module are tasked with developing a practical solution to a criminal justice problem presented by practitioners.

**When students learning is situated and contextualised** - Similarly, other forms of experiential learning such as undertaking a work placement enabled students to reflect on their criminological knowledge and understand how it could be applied beyond HE. Visits to CJS settings also provided them with engaging and enjoyable opportunities to contextualize their learning.

## IN WHAT WAYS CAN WE BETTER SUPPORT STUDENTS TO LEARN THROUGH AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE?

**Leading by example** - Students benefit from hearing about the experiences of academic staff who apply their research knowledge to practice (impact).

**Listening to practitioner experiences** - Guest lecturers enable students to see how they could apply their knowledge to the workplace and provide engaging 'war stories' that bring their learning to life.

**Experiential learning** - Students benefit from learning by practical work-related experience, whereby they gain concrete hands-on experience that they reflect back on. This can include workplace simulation or CJS visits.

**Situated learning** - Opportunities for students to apply their criminological knowledge to the workplace through work placements can be a valuable and deeply experiential learning process in which students feel emotionally invested. At Keele, students actively participate on a work placement with for example, a domestic violence or victim support charity.

## OWNERSHIP AND SELF-DIRECTION

**When they felt a sense of ownership** – When students had a personal or emotional investment in a module or assessment, they identified deeper and more sustainable learning because the activities were more memorable, enjoyable, and motivating and they felt personally invested.

**When learning was self-directed** – Students enjoyed the freedom and sense of ownership over their learning when activities were self-directed. Students expressed higher levels of intrinsic motivation (see definitions) and engagement in these modules and activities, and this increased their learning. Importantly, self-direction also helped students to fill in gaps in knowledge through the process of researching which assignments, projects and dissertation topics they wanted to pursue.

## IN WHAT WAYS CAN WE BETTER SUPPORT STUDENTS TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR LEARNING?

**Dissertations** – Enable students to apply their knowledge to a research problem in a self-directed and authentic way through dissertations that encourage ownership, engagement and motivation to learn and apply knowledge.

**Self-directed learning** – Teaching tools that support students to determine what they will research or how they will explore a problem, enhances students' ability to apply their knowledge and make the knowledge more memorable. For example, at Lancaster the Criminal Justice Research Module provides students with access to 'live' police crime data, and students decide what to analyse and how they want to analyse it.

## TEACHING FOR APPLICATION

**When the activities are problem-based** – Students described problem-based learning (see definitions) as 'more engaging' and 'easier to learn and digest' than traditional forms of learning based on involving lectures and reading lists.

**When they understand when to apply criminological knowledge** – Students often failed to fully understand how they could apply their knowledge beyond HE within the CJS. They were also not fully aware of the job opportunities available to them beyond the police, prison service etc.

**When theories related to contemporary examples** – Students found it difficult to understand the relevance of theories that are not contemporary. This lack of understanding led to a lack of engagement with and application of theoretical knowledge.

**When they practice applying their knowledge in diverse ways** – Students benefited from diverse forms of assessment and it enabled them to apply their knowledge in diverse ways. These also created 'memorable moments', identified by alumni as supporting knowledge application in their current job roles, as well as their memory of theoretical content.

**When theory and practical application is balanced** – Students strongly felt that there tended to be too much reliance on the standard essay format in Criminology courses. However, they also felt that there needed to be a balance between more traditional theory-based modules and those that are more practically orientated. This balance enabled them to reflect upon and apply their learning.

## IN WHAT WAYS CAN WE BETTER SUPPORT STUDENTS TO APPLY THEIR KNOWLEDGE?

**Problem based learning** – Students benefit from hands on active learning by attempting to resolve complex problems within the CJS. At Lancaster University, students developed a mental health-tracking app for Lancashire Constabulary. This app sought to address the problem that police officers++ were unlikely to self-refer for mental health support.

**Criminology related job and voluntary opportunities** – Students benefit from signposting to job and voluntary opportunities to give them the support and experience they need in a competitive jobs market beyond HE. In addition, CV and cover letter writing



experience for specific CJS jobs, supports students in important skills as well as helping them to practically apply their knowledge.

**Developing learning and assessments that support knowledge application** – At Keele, the Working for Justice Module asks students to complete a self-chosen practitioner report (e.g. pre-sentence, probation, or magistrates report) that encourages them to apply their criminological knowledge to WRL. In addition, make learning contemporary and relatable, for example by using case studies such as the 2011 riots or popular music (Lamphere, Shumpert & Clevenger, 2015) to apply theory.

**Developing diverse forms of assessment** – Preparing students to apply their knowledge in diverse ways bolsters students' ability to apply and remember their criminological knowledge. For example, the use of group work, presentations, reports, reflective essays, extended essays and dissertations, diversifies assessment rather than focusing solely on the usual 3000-word essay format.

**Learning Journeys, structured support and mapping skillsets across the course** – Make learning aims even clearer for students in terms of the different skillsets they can expect to get out of different modules, as well supporting students in clearly articulating their transferable skills. For Work Placement students, ensuring that CJS/Third Sector placements are structured in a manner that provides them with a specific role or task within that context, is essential to a successful student experience.

## BARRIERS

**When practical barriers are removed** – Alumni students identified not being able to gain access to journal articles as a practical barrier to the application of their knowledge once they leave university.

**When workplace cultural norms are not a barrier to knowledge application** – The cultural norms of organisations such as the police created a barrier for the application of students' knowledge to the workplace. Alumni students experienced resistance to the application of criminological knowledge, and

preference was given to 'learning on the job' and tacit rather than academic knowledge. This research team at Lancaster and Keele is currently considering how we support Criminology students in navigating resistant working cultures.

---

## TOOLS

Two new modules have been developed at both Lancaster and Keele Universities, as well as a mapping tool that documents the learning journey, assessments, and employability support.

For access to the teaching tools and modules described here, please contact Dr Sarah Kingston on:

**Email:** [s.kingston@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:s.kingston@lancaster.ac.uk)

**Tel:** 01524 594472

## DEFINITIONS:

**Experiential learning:** Educating through first-hand experience, where skills, knowledge, and experience are acquired outside of the traditional academic classroom setting.

**Intrinsic motivation:** Behaviour that is driven by personal interest and self-applied action rather than external pressures or rewards.

**Problem-based learning:** An instructional method of hands-on, active learning focused on the investigation and resolution of messy, real-world problems

## REFERENCES:

Lamphere, R. D., Shumpert, N. M., & Clevenger, S. L. (2015). Topping the Classroom Charts: Teaching Criminological Theory Using Popular Music. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 26(4), 530-544.  
QAA (2014) Subject Benchmark Statement: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/sbs-criminology-14.pdf>

For further information about the project, please contact:

Dr Sarah Kingston (Principal Investigator)

Dr Mary Corcoran (Co-PI)

Dr Rebecca Hibbin (Research Associate)

