



# **Programme Specification for MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice**

**2005/2006**

<b>1. Awarding institution/body</b>	<b>University of Oxford</b>
<b>2. Teaching institution</b>	<b>University of Oxford</b>
<b>3. Programme accredited by</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>4. Final award</b>	<b>M.Sc.</b>
<b>5. Programme</b>	<b>Criminology and Criminal Justice</b>
<b>6. UCAS code</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>7. Relevant subject benchmark statement</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>8. Date of programme specification</b>	<b>July 2005</b>

## **9. Educational aims of the programme**

- To provide students with the ability to:
  - evaluate the major theories and fundamental concepts in criminology and criminal justice;
  - analyse critically the inferences that can be drawn from empirical and historical observations of crime and the operation of the criminal justice and penal systems;
  - develop analytical skills required for critical appraisal of criminological research.
- To provide an advanced understanding of particular fields within criminology and criminal justice, relevant to their further careers or academic studies.

## **10. Programme outcomes**

On completing the degree satisfactorily, students should:

- have a systematic understanding of the key theories and debates, and a critical awareness of current problems and new insights, at the forefront of criminology and criminal justice;
- be well equipped for critical analysis of crime, criminal justice and the development of criminal justice policy;
- have learnt how to assess critically the contribution of research to understandings of crime and justice;
- have demonstrated originality in the application of criminological and criminal justice knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how the established techniques of criminological and criminal justice research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge about offenders, offending, and the criminal justice response;
- have learnt how to produce substantial pieces of written work after researching particular topics for their options and for their dissertation.

Each student will develop a detailed knowledge and understanding of six particular areas of criminological enquiry (i.e., those areas studied through options and dissertation), whilst all students will have acquired a solid understanding (through the compulsory core course) of:

1. The importance of methodical inquiry in criminology;
2. Historical, sociological and philosophical perspectives on criminal justice, punishment and the role of victims;

3. Different theoretical perspectives on deviance, crime and criminal justice;
4. Competing perspectives on the intersection of criminal policy, social policy, politics and academic research (particularly in the context of debates about (i) race (ii) gender and (iii) drugs);
5. The role of discretion in the criminal process.

Those students who have taken one or more options in research methods on the course will be able to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them.

### **Teaching/learning methods**

The primary method of teaching is through seminars at which all students are expected to contribute. These are supplemented by optional lectures and seminars with invited guest speakers, which make no requirement for students to conduct preparatory work or contribute.

A core course runs through the first six weeks of the first two terms (Michaelmas and Hilary). This weekly two-hour class, taught by the relevant experts from the MSc teaching group, is compulsory and students are expected to come prepared to contribute to each class. Preparation for classes is directed by detailed reading lists distributed to students during week 0 of Michaelmas Term at the latest. In these classes, students should acquire the knowledge detailed above (points 1 to 5) through their own reading in preparation for classes (reading the required and suggested materials, digesting them and making preparatory notes should take approximately 20 hours a week), and through discussing the readings with the core course teacher and their fellow students. Student learning is then consolidated through revision in preparation for the final assessment by unseen written examination.

Students also take two optional modules in each of the first two terms and one in the third (Trinity term), for the first six weeks of each term. Again, attendance at the weekly 90-minute classes is compulsory and students are expected to be well prepared so as to be able to contribute fully to the discussion. Preparation for classes is directed by detailed reading lists distributed to students, at the latest, during week 0 of each term (but more usually before the end of the previous term). In these classes, students should develop a detailed knowledge and understanding of their chosen option through their own reading in preparation for classes (reading the required and suggested materials, digesting them and making preparatory notes should take approximately 10 hours a week for each option), and through discussing the readings with the course teacher and their fellow students on that option. Student learning is then consolidated through the preparation of an assessed essay in relation to each of their chosen options.

In addition to the option students take in Trinity term, they write, during that term, a dissertation on a topic of their own choice of between 12,000 and 15,000 words. The dissertation should be library-based, and should not involve the student in any empirical research. Students are expected to carry out the research independently, with only minimum guidance from their dissertation supervisor. In order to ensure that students achieve a rough equality of access to supervision, a maximum of six hours supervision time has been stipulated, which should only be exceeded in exceptional cases. This time is to include both contact with the supervisor and time taken to read through and comment on drafts. Most students will choose to research an area close to one of their option or core course topics, although a few pursue intellectual interests which have not been specifically developed by this course.

### **Assessment**

#### Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is by the production of five written assignments (assessed essays, one for each option) written unsupervised and unaided during the last three weeks of term, production of a dissertation, and completion of a 3-hour unseen written examination based on the core course in which students are required to answer three questions under strict examination conditions.

The degree of MSc is awarded to any candidate who achieves a mark of at least 60 per cent for (a) the assessed essays, (b) the core course paper, and (c) the dissertation. For this purpose, the individual marks

of the five assessed essays are aggregated and an average mark awarded for the assessed essays as a whole. The examiners award a distinction to any candidate who achieves marks of at least 70 per cent on at least five of the papers; in this calculation, both the core course and the dissertation count as two papers.

The core course examination typically includes questions on all of the topics covered in the core course throughout the first two terms. Examiners set papers in line with the content of the course. Some questions cut across topics to assess the extent to which students have understood how, for example, practices in one area of the criminal process impact on those in another.

Options (other than the Methods options) are examined by means of an assessed essay of 3,500–5,000 words, for which time is set aside during the last three weeks of each term.

There are two methods of assessment for the Methods options, and both must be satisfactorily completed by all candidates. First, each candidate will be required to complete weekly assignments which will be marked on a pass/fail basis. A candidate who fails may be required to re-submit the assignment, normally within 7 days. Secondly, at the end of each of the two terms each candidate will be required to submit an essay of 2,500 to 3,000 words. In Michaelmas, a choice from three titles will be offered; in Hilary the essay will take the form of an imaginary research proposal of the candidate's own devising.

The dissertation must be between 12,000 and 15,000 words long on a topic of the student's choice, subject to the agreement of the MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice Board of Studies. The dissertation is carried out independently, with only minimum guidance from a dissertation supervisor. This tests the student's ability to work independently, to research the many sources of empirical or theoretical evidence for their thesis, and to produce a high-quality extended piece of written work.

All assessments are 'double blind' marked internally by two examiners, or an examiner and an assessor. A sample of scripts from those marked as pass and distinction, as well as any failed or borderline papers, is also reviewed by an external examiner.

### Formative Assessment

Formative assessment includes feedback through termly sessions for each student with their academic supervisor and (limited) feedback from dissertation supervisors. In addition, early in the first term the students attend a seminar on writing techniques at which advice is given on the expectations of the examiners and feedback provided to the students regarding their ideas about effective essay writing skills. A similar session takes place in Hilary term in relation to the task of writing a dissertation.

In Michaelmas term option teachers provide students with the chance to write one practice essay, from either of the two options they take, which are assessed and feedback given to students individually. Students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity as it is not possible to provide feedback on the compulsory assessed essays submitted in relation to each option taken.

There is an unseen two-hour, two-question MOCK examination for the core course (based only on the topics covered in Michaelmas term), taken in Week 0 of Hilary term at the Examination Schools. Students are required to answer two questions under strict examination conditions. This both provides an incentive for students to engage in early revision for the final examination and gives them the opportunity to practice their examination technique (this is particularly useful for students who have been out of formal education for a while). The result of this examination does not affect a student's final assessment for the MSc. Its purpose is to provide teachers with the opportunity to monitor the student's progress, identify areas of strength and weakness, and provide constructive feedback. Whilst the mock exam is not compulsory, students are strongly encouraged to take it.

### Skills and other attributes

Students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills during the course:

#### I. Intellectual skills

1. The ability critically to analyse and to deal systematically and creatively with complex theoretical and empirical work.
2. The ability to present in a concise manner, their understanding of complex theoretical issues or sophisticated empirical evidence and the ability to communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences.
3. The ability to draw together ideas from different disciplines and to synthesise them coherently.
4. The ability to demonstrate self-direction and originality in their application of knowledge and in tackling and solving problems, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the field of criminology and criminal justice.
5. The ability to demonstrate creativity and originality in applying their knowledge to new research questions (through their dissertation research).

### *Teaching/learning methods and strategies*

The main learning method is directed, private, library-based study in preparation for seminars in which students are expected to contribute fully to group discussion about the key issues and discuss different interpretations with one another. The dialogic character of argument in seminars is designed to encourage students to clarify and refine their ideas and responses to their preparatory reading. Students are encouraged to challenge each other and their tutors so that debates develop during class time.

Supervision of dissertations helps students to refine their thinking and consider competing perspectives on their topic.

*Assessment:* On-going formative assessment and feedback in classes and supervision sessions. Summative assessment through assessed essay, dissertation and core course examination.

## II. Practical skills

For all students taking the MSc:

1. Strong written skills through preparing for formal assessments
2. Good time management and the ability to keep to deadlines
3. Good research skills, particularly through preparing the dissertation.

For those who take the Methods options:

1. The ability to classify and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different research designs (specifically the “fit” among the methods, data, and argument) of criminological research both as published in refereed journals and as represented in policy/political debates in the popular press.
2. The ability to define, give the significance of, and use key concepts in research ethics.
3. The ability to choose appropriately, and describe in detail sufficient to justify to a non-specialist, a research design, a data source and a method of data analysis for a specific research project.

### *Teaching/learning methods and strategies*

For all students taking the MSc:

1. Preparing for formal assessments enhances written skills.
2. Good time management and the ability to keep to deadlines are encouraged through the demanding nature of the course with assessments taking place at the end of each of the three terms.
3. Good research skills are inculcated through the requirement that dissertations be largely self-directed. Skills include working independently towards: formulation of a thesis; secondary data analysis; comprehensive review of the literature; critical examination of theory and the development of theory; production of a well-structured and eloquent dissertation.

For those who take the Methods options:

1. Formal lecture style input, group projects, teacher and fellow student feedback sessions, practical 'hands on' work which includes the use of computer programs.

*Assessment:* On going formative assessment and feedback in classes. Summative assessment through option assignment.

### III. Transferable skills

1. Essential skills of writing and presentation (including, organising a thesis, using references and appendices, making citations).
2. Development of autonomous learning, showing responsibility and initiative.
3. Development of critical analysis.
4. Management of research (including managing their time, timetable, relationship with their supervisor).
5. The identification of library resources and how to use them (including searches on the Internet and research using other electronic resources, such as on-line journals).
6. Improvement of their general information and communication technology competence.
7. The independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.
8. Team working skills (in particular for those taking the Methods options).

### *Teaching/learning methods and strategies*

1. Seminars for which students need to prepare in the expectation that they will contribute fully to group discussion about the key issues and discuss different interpretations with one another.
2. Advice given by the Academic Supervisor at termly supervision sessions, by dissertation supervisors in Trinity term, and in the detailed Course Book.
3. Basic library training offered during weeks -1 and 0 of the academic year (induction weeks).
4. Seminar on essay writing skills provided during week 0 of the academic year (induction week).
5. Seminar on the skills needed to complete a dissertation provided at the beginning of Week 7 of Hilary term.

*Assessment:* On-going formative assessment and feedback in classes and supervision sessions. Summative assessment through assessed essay, dissertation and core course examination.

## 11. Programme Structures and Features

A Core Course, preceded by some introductory lectures during the Michaelmas Term induction week, runs through the first two terms (Michaelmas and Hilary) for the first six weeks of term. This weekly two-hour class is compulsory. The discussions which take place in the classes are invaluable for assisting students with the examination. Students are expected to come prepared to contribute to each class.

### Michaelmas Term

There are four introductory lectures held during weeks -1 and 0 of Michaelmas term and one introductory lecture held during 0 week in Hilary Term. These lectures have one of two aims. Some are designed to introduce students who are not familiar with the Criminal Justice System of England and Wales to the basic structures and mechanics of this system, so that when they prepare for core course classes they do so sharing a base knowledge about the system. Others introduce students to a topic which they will cover in depth in a core course seminar.

#### *Introductory Lectures*

1. The Field of Criminology
2. Explanation and Understanding in Criminology
3. The Structure of the English Criminal Justice System
4. An Introduction to Research Methods

#### *Seminars*

1. Crime, Modernity and the Urban Experience
2. Crime, Conformity and Sources of Control
3. Crime and Everyday Life: Rational Choice, Routine Activities and Emotional Life
4. Crime, Inequality and Opportunity: Crime in Market Societies
5. Constructing and Reacting to Crime: Labelling, Moral Panics and the State
6. Criminology, Crime and Control in Late Modernity

### Hilary Term

#### *Introductory Lecture*

1. The Exercise of Discretion

#### *Seminars*

1. The Exercise of Discretion
2. Models of Justice: Retributive and Restorative Justice
3. Sentencing Reform
4. Trends in the Use of Custody
5. Punishment in the Community
6. Crime and Criminal Justice: Public Knowledge and Opinion

Students also take two optional modules in each of the first two terms and one in the third (Trinity) term, for the first six weeks of each term only. Again, attendance throughout the weekly 90 minute classes is compulsory and students are expected to be well prepared so as to contribute fully to discussion.

### Options

#### Michaelmas Term

##### 1. Public Opinion and Crime

This seminar will explore the nature of public opinion regarding crime and criminal justice.

Public opinion plays a critical role in the evolution of criminal justice in all western nations. One reason for this is that the public around the world share a number of common beliefs with respect to crime and criminal justice. For example, the public has less confidence in criminal justice than most other public institutions. This is as true in Britain as it is in Eastern Europe. Recognition of low levels of confidence has led countries as diverse as Belgium, the United States and Australia to launch programs to improve the image of criminal justice. Similarly, the public in different countries subscribes to a number of myths regarding crime and criminal justice. For example, regardless of actual crime trends, most people assume that crime rates are constantly rising.

## **2. Methods 1: An Introduction to Methods of Data Collection**

How can social scientists be sure that the data used in research are valid and reliable? This course is focused on the challenges and the opportunities that different methods of data collection have for validity and reliability of data. Such methods include experiments and quasi-experiments; questionnaires and survey research; field research, and the collection of written documents. The scientific method, theory testing and research design will also be discussed. Ethical concerns are given special emphasis. This option will provide students with a knowledge base from which to choose appropriate ways to collect valid and reliable data given a particular research question. It will also help students assess the weight that can be placed on the findings of published research in the field of criminology. Students with an interest in proceeding to a research degree following completion of the MSc must take this option either as part of year one or year two of the M.Phil. Students considering the M.Phil are strongly encouraged to take this option as part of the first year of study.

## **3. Sentencing**

The aim of this option is to explore some of the legal, theoretical and empirical issues of sentencing, largely by reference to England and Wales. As well as analysing decisions on the use of imprisonment, the course examines the arguments about previous convictions and sentencing, and the justifications for allowing certain factors to mitigate sentence.

## **4. Mafias**

This course analyzes five criminal organizations that have emerged in different times and contexts: the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the American Mafia, the Russian Mafia, the Hong Kong Triads and the Japanese Yakuza. Students explore the extent to which these cases, notwithstanding their differences, share crucial characteristics and features. The course examines the historical origins of Mafias as well as what Mafias do in both legal and illegal markets. The second part of the course focuses on how Mafias perform their roles. Students study the resources, the organization, and instances of co-operation and competition between Mafias. The third part of the course analyzes the relationships between Mafias and other organizations, such as states, political parties, and politicians. Finally, the course explores factors that facilitate the expansion and the decline of Mafias.

## **5. Victims**

This course will examine the development of victimology and, in particular, the developing role of victims within the criminal process, in the UK and in other jurisdictions. In doing so, it will go beyond the rather narrow definition of 'victims' employed in the development of victim policy to look at how society responds to victims of atypical crimes and human rights abuses. In going beyond the typical, the course will rely not only on the disciplines of criminology, criminal justice and victimology, but also engage with politics, social policy and history. Students will be expected to study empirical, theoretical and policy work in these areas.

## **Hilary Term**

## **6. Human Rights and Criminal Justice**

This course looks at the development of human rights principles within the criminal justice system



under the European Convention of Human Rights and the Human Rights Act. Students are encouraged to think critically about the various stages of the criminal justice system in the UK, looking specifically at trial procedure, sentencing and imprisonment. This option is largely based on human rights case law and therefore it is most suitable for students with legal training. Non-lawyers considering this option should be aware that they will be expected to read cases in preparation for seminars.

The seminar topics are: 1. Pre-trial Justice; 2. Policing & Surveillance; 3. Silence & Self-incrimination; 4. Theoretical Foundations of Prisoners' Rights; 5. Protection of Personal Liberty; 6. Protection of Rights inside Prison.

## **6. Crime, Political Ideologies and Political Culture**

Crime, criminal justice and punishment have over the last three decades become increasingly prominent and contested topics – both within electoral politics and within everyday life. This development has been especially marked in Britain and the US, though related tendencies can be discerned – albeit unevenly - across many jurisdictions, both in Europe and elsewhere. This question of how this development can best be explained, and responded to, is the subject of some of the liveliest debate to be found in contemporary criminology. This option will seek to examine the causes, meanings and effects of this important development in contemporary societies. Its aim will be to examine the relationship between key concepts and traditions in political thought, the dynamics of electoral politics and political mobilization, and current developments in crime control.

## **7. Methods 2: Advanced Methods**

This option introduces students to different methods of data analysis and theory testing, and in particular methods for finding the existence of, strength, direction and pattern of association in the data. Special emphasis will be given to methods particularly well suited to the study of criminal groups and large-scale social processes: Social Network Analysis and Content Analysis, Comparative Historical Sociology, and basic Game Theory. This option will provide students with a knowledge base from which to choose methods of data analysis best suited to answer their research question. Students with an interest in proceeding to a research degree following completion of the MSc must take this option either as part of year one or year two of the M.Phil. Students considering the M.Phil are strongly encouraged to take this option as part of the first year of study

## **8. Risk and Criminal Justice**

A key feature of contemporary crime control is the prominent use of risk technologies and management practices. In the 'risk society' people are no longer viewed primarily as citizens with rights to be respected but rather as carriers of risk to be managed. This option will seek to analyze the ways in which risk management practices are transforming criminal justice structures and processes. Key questions addressed will include:

- In what ways is risk used as the basis to create categories of suspicion and target specific activities and populations?
- What impact has risk had on the way the police organize themselves and carry out their tasks?
- In what ways does risk configure working relations between the public police and private policing operations?
- What is the relationship between fear of crime, anxiety about security and the proliferation of crime prevention technologies?
- How important are crime prevention efforts by institutions beyond the criminal justice system?
- What are the costs associated with seeking security from risk?
- What challenges for justice are posed by the risk society?

## **9. International Perspectives in Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice is a term of unsettled meaning but can be seen as encompassing a diverse and developing set of values, processes and aims which share an orientation towards repairing the harm caused by crime. The most well-known restorative processes involve victims and offenders coming face-to-face to discuss the offence, the harm it caused, and how this might be put right. This course considers various models of restorative justice across the world. It examines the role of victims, offenders and communities, integrating theoretical and empirical knowledge and sociological critiques of different restorative approaches. It also tackles such difficult philosophical questions as whether restorative justice can be an appropriate substitute or supplement to formal state-administered justice, and whether it can operate satisfactorily when power imbalances between offenders and victims are great, as in cases of domestic violence and racially motivated offending. Videos of actual restorative conferences are used as starting-points for discussion in some weeks.

## **Trinity Term**

### **10. The Death Penalty**

This course will discuss the legal and social history of capital punishment through to the present-day scope of the death penalty and the scale of executions. In examining the development of an abolitionist movement on a world-wide scale, the seminars will explore relevant empirical research and legal judgments relating to its application and effects. They will focus on the main features which are fundamental to its arbitrariness: race, religion, quality of legal representation and vulnerable defendants. Finally the roles of public opinion, politics and international human rights law will be considered in the moves to retain and abolish the death penalty. Whilst some of these issues will be explored from the perspective of many jurisdictions which have retained the death penalty, the primary focus of the course is on the US.

### **11. Public and Private Policing**

This course examines the changing relationship between public and private policing and the implications for criminal justice and society. Topics include: 1) the growth in, and changing organisation of, private policing; 2) the role of the public police in public spheres and popular culture; 3) the obstacles to public police involvement in private spheres and how some of these obstacles are overcome; 4) the role of the private police in public spheres; 5) private policing in private justice systems; 6) surveillance technologies and the transformation of public and private policing.

### **12. Desistance From Crime: The Role of Criminal Justice Agencies**

This course focuses on why and how offenders give up crime with particular reference to the roles of three criminal justice services: the probation service, the youth justice service and the prison service. The option explores two generally separate areas of research: (a) theories of desistance and (b) 'what works' to reduce reoffending; and considers how they inform each other and ways in which they have been taken up in practice. The seminar topics are: 1) Desistance theories and research; 2) The contribution of probation and youth justice services to the desistance process; 3) Research findings on 'what works' to assist desistance; 4) Implementing 'what works' in probation and youth justice practice; 5) The effects of imprisonment on the desistance process; 6) The limits of criminal justice agencies: the roles of personal agency, the community and the state.

In addition to the option students will take in Trinity term, they write, during that term, a dissertation of between 12,000 and 15,000 words. They have a maximum of six hours supervision for this.

## **12. Support for Students and their learning**

Students receive support on any non-academic matters from their college advisors, and can discuss with these advisors their academic progress.

The department appoints each student an Academic Supervisor. Whilst specifically concerned with their academic progress, academic supervisors can also offer support on a range of welfare matters. Students are expected to meet their academic supervisors at the beginning and end of the first term (Michaelmas term), and at the end of the second and third terms, although students can contact their supervisor at any time during term if they have problems or concerns which they feel cannot wait until the next scheduled meeting. Likewise, supervisors might proactively arrange an additional meeting during term if they have pressing concerns about a student's progress. The Academic Supervisor is required to write a report on each student's academic progress each term and the contents of this report are communicated to the student, the student's college, and the Graduate Studies Office.

In addition, students can receive support from college or department specialist advisors, such as the Welfare Officer or Harassment Officer, Advisor to Women Students, or even the Head of Department. Many colleges have extensive 'Welfare Teams' of fellow students, academic and other staff (for example, nurse, doctor, and chaplain).

If students experience personal problems which they would prefer not to discuss with their academic or college supervisor, they can contact the University Counselling Service. In addition, in induction week a seminar will be held on student mental health. This seminar, and the booklet which accompanies it, explains the many pressures and challenges students might face during their studies and outlines some of the common problems and mental illnesses that can affect students, ways of dealing with them, and available sources of help. It also includes a detailed list of all sources of help, within the University, locally within Oxford, and nationally, to help students cope with the more minor and the more serious problems. The list explains the work of different support agencies and provides complete contact details.

All MSc students have access to a wide range of resources and facilities offered by the Law Faculty and the Centre for Criminology. The Faculty provides approximately 70 workstations exclusively for law graduate students in the St Cross building. Each study space is equipped with an ethernet socket providing access to the University computer network. There is also an adjoining sitting area, with a drinks machine, and a separate locker room containing 150 lockers where law graduate students may store their personal effects if they wish. Students also have access to college and University computing equipment. IT support is provided by the University, and by each of the colleges or halls.

In 2004 the Centre for Criminology's library collection was absorbed into the Social Sciences Library. Unlike many libraries in Oxford, this new library, located on the ground floor of the Centre for Advanced Social Studies, has lending (as well as reference only) copies of key books. The library has ample graduate workspace and state-of-the-art computing facilities. It is located next to the St Cross Building. The Centre for Criminology is situated on the top floor of the Centre for Advanced Social Studies (Manor Road Building).

The Bodleian Law Library is an extremely useful reference library for MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice students as it holds the Bodleian's main collection on this subject, and it receives material by copyright deposit. It also purchases items of academic merit from other countries. Series of relevant government papers are held. It therefore has an extensive collection of UK and Irish law, including subsidiary jurisdictions, and has one of the largest holdings of UK statutes and law reports. It provides students with access to a book and journal collection which should cover most, if not all, of their academic needs, almost all on open-shelves. It also has many CR-ROM and web resources on site-license. In term time the library remains open into the late evening on weekdays and during the day at weekends. It also remains open during the day until 7pm during the vacations. The library staff provide induction tours for new students as well as on-going support.

The Centre for Criminology holds regular research seminars which all graduate students are expected to attend, and which attract distinguished speakers from the international academic community, government and criminal justice agencies. The Centre's research staff can also help with teaching and are available to advise students on their academic plans.

The University provides numerous services to help all of its students. Those most relevant to postgraduates in criminology include:

- The Careers Service, which provides comprehensive information and impartial guidance to students and graduates of Oxford University at all stages of the career decision making process.

- The Computing Service, which provides high quality, low cost, IT support for all students from those just beginning to become familiar with computers to those who need advice about very advanced computer programmes. It also provides access to workstations at its site, computing courses, site-licensed software and email and web space accounts for all.
- The International Office, which is responsible for administering the University's scholarship and bursary schemes for international students. It also runs an annual Orientation Programme for new international students, and provides advice about funding and other issues particularly affecting international students, including immigration questions.
- The Language Centre, which provides resources and services for members of the University who need foreign languages for their study, research or personal interest.

### 13. Criteria for Admission

Candidates for admission would normally possess (or be predicted to obtain) a first class or high upper second class (or its equivalent) degree in law, sociology, politics, economics, social policy, psychology, history, or another subject relevant to criminology. A high upper second class degree is defined as one in which an average mark of 65% or above is attained in courses counting towards the final undergraduate degree classification. Extensive employment experience within the field of criminal justice may be regarded by the selection panel as compensating for a lack of an undergraduate degree to the required standard.

Competence in English Language: A good command of written English is essential for success in the MSc in Criminology and we make it a precondition of admission. If English is not your native language, you are required to achieve a score of at least 630 (or 267 in the computer-based test) in TOEFL (together with a score of at least 5 in the TOEFL Test of Written English, TWE); or one of at least 7.5 in IELTS. Our own preference is for IELTS. You must supply your test result with your application.

Students are not normally interviewed (as this can unfairly discriminate against overseas students who cannot so easily be available for interview). However, the Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology is happy to talk with students considering applying for the Course to describe the content, teaching, assessment, etc and to answer any questions.

As with the other departments and colleges in the University, the Admissions Panel, comprising the Director or Assistant Director of the Centre for Criminology, and one other member of the MSc core teaching staff, selects students for admission solely on the individual merits of each candidate and the application of the relevant selection criteria. To these ends, students submit a statement of why they wish to be accepted for the course and two samples of their written work. Three academic references are also taken into consideration.

As each year there is a target for the number of MSc students admitted to the course (currently 20) we cannot commit to offer a place to every student who meets our criteria. In recognition of this, we seek to review applications in a gathered field as this enables us to offer places to the best-qualified and most suitable students. Applicants who are thought able but do not at the time of application meet all of the selection criteria may be offered a conditional place. Conditions usually relate to the obtaining of the required standard of undergraduate degree or ability in the English language. Once students have notified us of their results, they will be informed as to whether or not they are fully accepted.

In reviewing applicants the following qualitative admissions criteria are employed (applicants and their referees are encouraged to address these criteria specifically):

**Application:** exceptional academic motivation; capacity for sustained and intense work; developed ability to organise time and set own agenda for study; intrepid attitude towards investigation and learning.

**Knowledge:** Applicants will normally have a broad, deep, advanced, and integrated understanding of a subject relevant to criminology such as sociology, economics, politics, psychology, social policy, history or other Humanities. Preference may be given to those who have studied some criminology, criminal justice, penology, criminal law or the sociology of deviance.

Reasoning ability: outstanding analytical abilities, the ability speedily to separate the relevant from the irrelevant, and the ability to develop and sustain complex arguments under pressure; capacities for accurate observation and insightful criticism, including willingness and ability to engage with other social science disciplines; originality and creativity of thought, open-mindedness, and capacity for lateral thinking; excellent powers of synthesis and economy of thought.

Communication: willingness and ability to express highly complex ideas clearly and effectively in English, with a particular eye to finesse and economy and an aspiration to professional standards of style and organisation in scholarly writing.

## 14. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning

### Student Feedback

This course has a number of objectives. The Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology and teachers are committed to making a thorough evaluation to assess whether the aims and objectives of the course are being achieved and to improve the course by identifying its strengths and weaknesses. There are various methods by which we seek to obtain feedback from students about their experiences. There are informal means by which students can communicate their experiences of this course: through their meetings with their Academic Supervisor and through direct communication with the course teachers. Rather more formal is the role of the **Student Representative**. Students have the opportunity to elect a representative amongst their cohort in week 0 of Michaelmas Term. This person attends termly meetings with the MSc Criminology Board of Studies to represent the students' needs and interests. Apart from this, there is a more structured method for conducting course evaluation, namely the use of an anonymous questionnaire administered in week 6 of each term.

The questionnaire covers the following areas:

- core course (content, methods of teaching);
- options (content, methods of teaching);
- department and university facilities and resources;
- dissertation (Trinity term only);
- supervision;
- student assessment process.

The questionnaires are administered by the Course Administrator and no teaching member of staff is present while students fill in the questionnaire. The feedback is then collated, the quantitative data are coded into an SPSS file and the findings presented to the M.Sc. Board of Studies.

The Board of Studies feeds back to the students, via the Student Representative, their responses to students' comments and concerns. The Board makes clear which of the suggestions for change they feel able to act upon. In some cases change might not be possible until the following academic year.

Subject to the requirements of data protection legislation, the Course Administrator maintains a database on its alumni to track how our students fare in the employment or higher education market, to review the appropriateness of the course for certain careers, to help students keep in touch with each other, and to provide new students with ideas about possible career choices.

### Staff appointment, training and appraisal

- Newly appointed members of academic staff are required to attend a training programme organised by the University's Institute for Teaching and Learning.
- A senior member of the academic staff is also assigned to each more junior appointee as a mentor, with a brief to provide advice and support pro-actively on teaching matters as well as other aspects of professional development.

- Teaching by recently appointed members of academic staff is witnessed and evaluated by a more senior member of academic staff (not the mentor) before the appointment is confirmed at the five-year-point.
- Teaching assessment and self-assessment also play an important part in the Faculty's system of continuing staff appraisal.

#### Curriculum Review and Course Management

Responsibility for the course is vested in the Law Board within the Social Sciences Division. The divisional board has formal responsibility for the maintenance of quality and standards for all courses under its aegis.

Responsibility for the organisation and delivery of the MSc is shared between the Director of Graduate Studies and the MSc Board of Studies. The MSc Board of Studies reports to the Management Committee of the Centre for Criminology (which has representatives from the division outside of Criminology and Law) and to the Law Faculty's Graduate Studies Committee. The Graduate Studies Committee reports to the Law Faculty Board, which reports to the Social Sciences Divisional Board. These Boards take an active interest in major curriculum changes as well as academic appointments.

The role of the Board of Studies is:

#### Open Business –

1. to ensure that the relevant procedures for MSc students, whether at department or faculty level, are followed appropriately and monitored regularly;
2. to ensure that the department and faculty procedures relating to the MSc operate effectively, and in conformity with the requirements set out in the Examination Regulations;
3. to review students' access to and use of department and faculty equipment, resources and facilities;
4. to review (on an annual basis) the Course programme specification;
5. to review (on a termly basis) the progress of the Course;
6. to monitor the continuing standard of the course, and the results of students on the course, in the light of assessment results and reports from internal and external examiners;
7. to review policies and procedures relating to marketing of the course and admissions to the course (including monitoring admissions in relation to Centre for Criminology and law faculty limits on the number of candidates admitted);
8. to review students' needs and interests (as indicated by the student representative, elected each year during induction week, by general student and tutor feedback and by formal course evaluation procedures);
9. to review the continuing appropriateness and effectiveness of the content/syllabus of the course, especially in relation to the aims and learning outcomes identified for the course, in the light of any developments in subject knowledge and practice, and issues highlighted in internal and external examiners' reports and recommend (to the Law Board) changes to the course content or methods of learning;
10. to review (on an annual basis) the range of options offered and amend the list of options accordingly;
11. to review (on an annual basis) staff resources, physical facilities available to support the Course and arrangements for teaching and to cooperate with the Criminal Justice and Penology teaching group regarding needs and available teaching resources;

12. to formulate examination conventions for approval by the social sciences divisional board;
13. to review the continuing appropriateness of examining procedures established by the Board of Examiners;
14. to review (on an annual basis) the assessment methods and to monitor their continued appropriateness for the learning outcomes;

#### Closed Business –

1. to discuss and review students' progress with a particular focus on 'green flag' students (as indicated by the supervisors' reports reviewed by the Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology);
2. to decide on the appropriate course of action and possible sources of support for a student who needs to be advised that desired academic standards have not yet been, or are unlikely to be, achieved;
3. to seek to identify means whereby support can be provided to the supervisor(s) where serious concerns about a student's ability or application in relation to the satisfactory completion of the course have been raised;
4. to consider all complaints and appeals about the course and to refer them, where appropriate, to the Proctors' office;
5. to recommend to the Faculty's Examinations Committee (on an annual basis) a Chair of Examiners (who reports to the Board of Studies on all examination procedures) and a Board of Examiners and assessors.

To these ends, the Board of Studies meets each term during the seventh week and comprises the Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology, the Board of Examiners, the Director or Assistant Director of the Centre for Criminology and the Student Representative (for open business only).

#### Review beyond the Faculty

- The report of external examiners is a major source of insight into the MSc's strengths and weaknesses.
- The Social Science Divisional Board and the University's Educational Policy and Standards Committee issue guidance and provide general supervision.
- The Law Faculty is subject to six-yearly reviews by the University as well as the currently prevailing review systems of the Quality Assurance Agency.
- The Centre for Criminology Committee of Management, which meets termly, reviews the progress of the course, including, as appropriate, reports from the Chair of Examiners, the External Examiner and the Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology.

## 15. Regulation of assessment

All examinations for the MSc (including assessed essays and dissertations) are regulated by the University's Examination Regulations, and compliance with these is supervised by the University Proctors (a judicial authority appointed independently of the administration). In addition, the University and the Social Sciences Division have general policy guidelines relating to the examination process. Examination conventions specific to this programme, governing matters not dealt with in the Regulations, are agreed by the MSc Board of Examiners and then approved initially by the Board of Studies and then by the Faculty's Examinations Committee, reporting to the Faculty Board. The Examinations Committee also appoints the Board of Examiners and Assessors and supervises the conduct of examinations. The Nominating

Committee recommends to the Vice Chancellor the name of the External Examiner, who usually serves for three years.

The Board of Examiners is responsible for the setting of papers and for the marking of scripts. University Regulations permit the Board to be assisted in setting and marking by Assessors, and a few members of academic staff in the Centre for Criminology and the wider Law Faculty serve as Assessors for the MSc.

Questions for the assessed essays are set by the option tutor and approved by the Board of Examiners, and finally by the External Examiner. Each essay is then double-blind marked by the two assessors for each option. Any fails or borderlines are reviewed by the External Examiner.

Dissertation titles are approved by the Board of Studies (closed business) during Hilary term. Dissertations are double blind marked by two assessors appointed by the Board of Examiners (the supervisor for the dissertation, appointed by the Board of Studies, has no responsibility for marking the dissertation). Any fails or borderlines are reviewed by the External Examiner.

Co-assessors whose individual marks are very close (within three marks) usually agree to 'meet half way' and where 'half way' falls between two grades they choose the higher of the two. If there is a wider discrepancy between the marks they discuss their decisions and one or both might agree to re-read the paper and re-consider their grade. Where they cannot agree, a third opinion is sought from another assessor or examiner. Agreed marks are sent to the External Examiner whose job it is to review the marking, but not to 'third mark' assignments.

The Core Course Exam is set by two of the examiners, approved by the Board of Examiners and the External Examiner, and double-blind marked by the two examiners who set the paper. It is customary for these two examiners to consult those who taught the Core Course about the questions which should be set in the examination.

#### Arrangements for Reassessments

Core course: Candidates who fail the core-course examination may re-sit the examination in the Trinity term of the following academic year. Candidates who have completed successfully either or both of (a) the options (i.e. have obtained an aggregate mark of 60 per cent or more), and (b) the dissertation may carry forward the marks gained for the successfully completed parts of the course.

Options: Candidates who fail to obtain an aggregate average mark of 60 per cent for their assessed essays in Michaelmas, Hilary and Trinity terms may resubmit those essays in which they have received a mark of 59 per cent or less to the Clerk of the Schools according to the standard timetable for submitting essays in the following academic year. Candidates who have completed successfully (a) the core course examination (b) the dissertation (c) any essay for which they have received a mark of 60 per cent or more, may carry forward the marks gained for the successfully completed parts of the course.

Dissertation: Candidates who fail the dissertation may resubmit the dissertation by the required date in the Trinity term of the following academic year. Such candidates who have completed successfully either, or both, of (a) the core course and (b) the options may carry forward the marks gained for the successfully completed parts of the course.

No-one may gain the degree of MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice without having attained pass marks in all three elements of the degree, namely the core course exam, the options, and the dissertation.

#### The Role of Examiners

Internal and external examiners are required to produce reports after the examinations for consideration by the Centre's Management Committee, the Social Sciences Board and the EPSC. The External Examiner who reports to the Vice-Chancellor each year in which they act comments on whether the standards are appropriate to the award, in part by comparisons with the standards of comparable institutions, and whether the assessment procedures and the regulations governing them, are fair and appropriate. The External Examiner is also required to report on whether the conduct of the examination and the determination of awards have been fairly conducted, and whether individual student performance has been judged in



accordance with the regulations and conventions of the Examining Board. Specifically, External Examiners' reports are expected to cover the following points:

- the standards demonstrated by the students;
- the extent to which standards are appropriate for the award;
- the design, structure and marking of assessments;
- the procedures for assessment and examinations;
- whether or not external examiners have had sufficient access to, and the power to call upon, any material necessary to make the required judgements;
- students' performance in relation to their peers in comparable courses;
- the coherence of the policies and procedures relating to external examiners and their consonances with the explicit roles required of them;
- the basis and rationale for any comparisons made;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort;
- the quality of learning which may be indicated by student performance.

The Report is addressed to the Vice-Chancellor, and will be considered by the Faculty of Law, the Social Science Division Board, the Educational Policy and Standards Committee, and the Centre for Criminology Committee of Management. It is also circulated to all MSc Course tutors.

### Marking Scale

The degree of MSc is awarded to any candidate who achieves a mark of at least 60 per cent for (a) the assessed essays (b) the core course paper and (c) the dissertation. For this purpose, the individual marks of the five assessed essays are aggregated, and an average mark awarded for the assessed essays as a whole. The examiners award a distinction to any candidate who achieves marks of at least 70 per cent on at least five of the papers; in this calculation, both the core course and the dissertation count as two papers.

#### ≥ 70 Distinction

A very good or excellent answer that is well structured, well argued and comprehensive. It will be analytical, rather than merely descriptive and will go beyond the most obvious sources of knowledge. The candidate will have demonstrated an unusually clear grasp of most of the issues (including all the more important ones), used an unusually wide range of material, and displayed very good skills in evaluating the material and using it to construct arguments which deal with the issues.

#### 60-69 Pass

A reasonable or good answer. The candidate has demonstrated a competent grasp of most of the more important issues, a familiarity with and understanding of a reasonable range of relevant materials, and good skills in evaluating the material and using it to construct arguments which deal with the issues.

#### ≤ 60 Fail

An unsatisfactory piece of work. At best, the answer will simply describe the most relevant research and debates but will not demonstrate any skill at analysis or argumentation. It is likely that this candidate will not have clearly demonstrated much understanding of the question or the issues it raises. Some of the most relevant material is likely to have been ignored and irrelevant material included.

## **16. Indicators of quality and standards**

This is a relatively new course and therefore has not yet been subject to systematic internal or external review. Issues of quality and standards are however addressed in both internal and external examiners' reports and other forms of course evaluation (see 14 above) on an annual basis.

The Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology makes the External Examiner's report available to all course tutors and puts in place mechanisms designed to ensure that all of those involved in the Course can build on the strengths identified. Professor Andrew Rutherford (Southampton University) was the first External Examiner for the course and his reports for the first three years were extremely positive. He commented in 2002 that he had been "very much inspired from his involvement in the MSc on procedural and substantive grounds", in 2003 that "the teaching and learning methods are of a very high order indeed" and in 2004 that the course "has set very high standards and enjoys an unusual scope in topics addressed". At the end of the 2003/2004 academic year the Law Faculty appointed Professor Andrew Sanders (Manchester University) as the external examiner for the M.Sc. for a further three years. The Director of Graduate Studies for Criminology gives feedback on all aspects of the Course and is accountable to the Centre for Criminology Management Committee.

The Course is under the aegis of the Faculty of Law which achieved a rating of 5+ in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise. It is organised by the Centre for Criminology which received a very favourable review in 2001 from the Social Sciences Division of the University. Their report noted, in relation to the MSc, that "The committee recognises the value of this course in allowing the centre's expertise to be put to wider educational use ..." Finally, a less formal measure of the quality of graduates from this MSc is the success that they enjoy in all aspects of the job-market and in admission to doctoral programmes in this or other high calibre universities.