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Promoting Success for All in Criminology: Widening Participation and Recognising Difference

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Introduction

Criminology, as with most social science subjects, is an undergraduate discipline that is popular, accessible and attracts several diverse student types from quite varied backgrounds—sometimes with an eclectic mix of qualifications, life experiences and ambitions. This should generally be viewed as positive, although it is a mix that can cause problems in the transition to Higher Education (HE) and potentially once the programme has commenced. The emerging popularity of criminology has resulted in high course numbers at many institutions (see Young, 2022) which further increases the diversity of the cohort. The response has been for students from a Widening Participation (WP) or ‘non-traditional’ A-level routes of entry encouraged to apply, mainly

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by universities seeking to address diversification and increase their percentage of WP students, improving their inclusivity.

This chapter challenges the notion that everyone starts equally and suggests that the playing field is far from level. Often considerations focus upon their qualification with additional factors being part of the welcome for new students. The chapter explores the diversity on criminology degree programmes and considers how such a range of backgrounds and experiences can be best utilised, whilst ensuring a safe environment whereby students can achieve their full potential.

There is little doubt that this diverse mix of students enriches the teaching environment, but the classroom needs to be managed to ensure everyone benefits, and enable students to attain the best results for them during a positive holistic student experience. Harding's chapter in this edited collection has further discussed teaching sensitive topics, alongside the diversity of student types in the classroom environment, identifying the challenges that currently exist.

The challenge for criminology and the social sciences is how we can cope with this diversity and ease the transition to HE, enabling students from non-traditional A-level routes to fit in and assimilate into this level of study quickly. This is part of creating an equitable classroom, whereby all students can achieve their full potential. This chapter will explore these issues as a series of deficits: A *skills deficit*, where students from vocational and other backgrounds may be unfamiliar with academic study and academic writing and may not have a required level of basic skills; A *social deficit*, where students may find it difficult to assimilate into their new surroundings, living away from home for the first time and a *cultural deficit*, where international students and students, from mainly working-class backgrounds and non-traditional routes of entry may find it difficult to mix, leading to an overwhelming experience, more recently labelled as acculturation. Literature from Shields and Masardo, (2015) is framed in the lack of knowledge about expectations at degree-level study and identifies the lack of inappropriate or even misguided preparation in approaching the transition to HE. This chapter discusses the effect of such deficits and how they can be addressed both at the point of entry, during the transitional period and subsequently in the classroom.

Promoting Success for All in Criminology: The Widening Participation Strategy

From experience, many academic staff, including academic personal tutors, believe that on arrival at university to begin a degree programme, everyone starts equally, regardless of previous qualifications, social background, or life experiences, with everything starting afresh from this point. This is largely a myth, as although it sounds very reassuring, it can also be perceived as a barrier for some students from non-traditional backgrounds, considering how they assimilate into university life. Background, entry qualifications and to an extent, your social status, define who you are and if you feel you do not 'fit in' this can make the transition to university both daunting and challenging.

Adopting this stance results in an acknowledged series of deficits, each presenting its own challenge for assimilation and the transition to degree studies. A *skills deficit*, caused by not having the required skills for degree-level studies; a *social deficit* as the student struggles to find their place in new and unfamiliar surroundings and make friends with peers; a *cultural deficit*, or acculturation, caused by coming from a non-traditional, A-level background or from a lower socio-economic background and having difficulty 'fitting in'. Therefore, the idea of WP is positive and laudable, but the challenges posed are complex.

In addition to the 'traditional' A-level student intake, criminology programmes also attract mature students and international students, as well as students from varied backgrounds, including practitioners (and those looking to become practitioners) in the uniformed public services and/or the wider criminal justice system (for example magistrates, Police, Probation or Prison Officers). Some students are looking to use their experience of the criminal justice system to move forward to education, with the social sciences (criminology in particular) tending to attract a small, but substantial number of ex-offenders and ex-prisoners. These students are seeking to turn their often-negative experience of incarceration and/or probation supervision into something more positive, seen as rehabilitation through education.

The qualifications that students enter criminology courses with are understandably varied. They include vocational qualifications, such as

the BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) and general National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) being represented in most degree programmes. The BTEC National (Pearson Education) is aimed at the workplace, specifically not academic study at degree level, but the qualification is awarded equivalent UCAS (University and Colleges Admissions Service) points and has therefore a legitimate route to university. The T-Level (Technical level) introduced in 2020, albeit currently with a reduced range of subjects, will further add to that mix. The T-level is like the BTEC National, but with more in-work placement time (20%). This new qualification will also have A-level equivalency, UCAS points and therefore, as with the BTEC, opens a new pathway to HE, when the qualification is aimed primarily at the workplace and not the academic route (www.tlevels.co.uk). Most criminology programmes accept students from foundation and access courses, programmes which tend to give students good practical academic skills and prepare them well for the rigours of a degree programme.

WP has become a strategic priority for many universities in recent years, with great credence given to the ‘percentage’ of students accepted onto degree programmes from this route. However, in addition to differing qualifications, this initiative will also see more students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It could be argued that although this ‘percentage’ can make a good headline and universities regularly promote this in prospectuses, if these students gain a lower classification than more traditional students, or suffer significantly higher attrition rates than A-level entrants, then it becomes a meaningless statistic. If equality of access to university is encouraged and promoted via WP, then students must be actively and fully supported, not just left alone to see how they fare, in effect, this would potentially set students up to fail.

The basic aim of WP is to encourage those from non-traditional backgrounds or with non-traditional qualifications (the A-level route being viewed as the ‘traditional’ qualification) to consider taking a degree course. It is looking to address the discrepancies in participation from ‘under-represented’ groups and break down barriers to access (Connell-Smith & Hubble, 2018). For example, this could be due to low socio-economic status or poor educational engagement and/or attainment to this point. It has not only become an extremely popular

initiative in colleges and universities, but has spawned a wider industry, seeing the introduction of a plethora of qualifying vocational courses to enable students to move directly to degree-level studies. Over the past two decades, we have seen an increase in foundation programmes and vocational courses to encourage higher participation at the degree level.

The Office for Students (2019) indicated that whilst numbers on Access courses had declined in the period 2012–2013 and 2017–2018 from just under 37,000–30,000 (a fall of approximately 18%), foundation programmes were in the ascendancy, with numbers increasing quite dramatically in the same period from just over 10,000–30,000 (Office for Students, 2019: 3). Access courses (diplomas) are usually taught at further education colleges, whereas foundation programmes are usually taught at universities with a link to a future degree programme at that university (e.g., a ‘one plus three’ arrangement, covering four years of study) and tend to be subject specific, thus arguably making them both more attractive and secure.

A study of BTEC Nationals by Mackay (2016) found that BTEC/vocational students were more likely to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds (twice as likely as A-level students) and be the first in their family to go to university. The study also found that these students are drawn to subjects such as Art and Design, and Business Management, with few looking to study ‘elite’ subjects, such as Law or Medicine and around 7% applying to the social sciences generally, with only a minority making applications to the higher ranking/higher tariff UK universities (Mackay, 2016). The Office for Students conducted a consultation in 2018 on how this inequality would be addressed and recommended seven proposals to be in place to reduce the levels of inequality across student recruitment. Some of these were to equal opportunities in the longer term, with the proposition of an initial five-year plan to start to put changes in place. Proposals included how institutions intended to reduce the gaps in access, success, and provision of non-traditional students. Providers were required to complete a self-assessment of progress and submit returns (Office for Students, 2018: 9–10). The response from UCAS was incredibly supportive of these measures to increase entry and participation for the groups least likely to apply to HE and to progress to ensure that ‘everyone who can

benefit from higher education (HE) can do so—and go on to succeed once enrolled’ (UCAS, 2019).

The origins of this move to encourage higher participation in HE can be traced back to 1997 with the newly-elected Prime Minister Tony Blair (New Labour), who declared the importance of gaining a degree and encouraged higher numbers to attend university for all who have the ability and wish to attend, regardless of socio-economic background. Setting an ambitious target of 50% of 18–30-year-olds going to university, but this was not achieved in reality, with less than 40% of that group studying at university during the tenure of Blair’s premiership. Although that target was abandoned in the late 2000s, the idea of more people going to university remained firmly on the agenda and led to an ideological education policy, which was accepted across the political divide (Gill, 2008).

From 2010 to 2015, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government and subsequent Conservative governments continued with this strategy, under the guise of ‘social mobility’, with a target set to double the numbers of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds moving to degree studies ‘to increase by 20% the numbers of students from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds entering HE’, and to increase the numbers of students with a disability. The key to the strategy is that a degree is seen as a driver of upward social mobility (cited in Connell-Smith & Hubble, 2018: 3), which is remarkably like the original New Labour strategy of promoting inclusivity and participation in HE.

Social and Cultural Deficits

In looking at the issues as a series of deficits, the social deficit is about personality and socialisation. Some individuals find it naturally difficult to adapt and assimilate into new surroundings, particularly having left the home environment for the first time as many new students have.

Leese (2010) constructed a ‘new student’—a more contemporary student, often part time, now more likely to not have A-levels and to arrive from a variety of social backgrounds. Leese suggests that these students struggle to ‘fit in’, both academically and socially (Leese, 2010:

242). Most simply do not have the academic skills required, particularly the need to be an independent thinker and learner, but also socially, as they struggle to come to terms with their new environment, suggesting that approximately one in five students have problems settling in academically and socially and that this requires attention to enable them to negotiate the transition (Leese, 2010). Such students will be required to 'mind the gap' (Lowe & Cook, 2003: 53) and address these deficits caused by being unprepared for the rigours of degree-level study. It is more than simply inequality, there is in fact a detrimental 'false equivalence', but the problems persist and will become more critical as the number of vocational students who enter HE potentially continues to rise as projected (Shields & Masardo, 2017: 16).

With such a variety of backgrounds and qualification routes, it is important to challenge the assumption that everyone arrives equal. I have experienced this way of thinking both as an academic and as a student; the idea that everyone, regardless of background, age, qualifications, and experience is starting out on the course as 'equals', and that none of the potential differences or deficits will be an issue going forward. It could be argued that 'equity' is required here, not simply well-intentioned sound-bites of equality, welcome as that may be and reassuring as it can sound to a student who is trying to settle into unfamiliar surroundings. Attention must be paid to difference, otherwise these students can become outsiders and it is apparent that students are most certainly not equal on arrival in freshers' week. These deficits can cause anxiety, problems of assimilation with peers and a feeling of not fitting in or experiencing imposter syndrome, where lesser-qualified students or students from lower socio-economic groups may feel that they are not worthy of their university place, becoming outsiders looking in. Some may be confused by their success and surprised at gaining a place at an established university with their 'less important' vocational qualification, where many peers will have high grades at A-level. This was noted by Clance and Imes (1978) who identified 'imposter phenomenon', initially thought to affect mainly women and being linked to 'sex-role stereotyping' (Clance & Imes, 1978: 241). Later research found that gender was in fact just one

driver of this phenomenon, and that other issues, including low self-esteem, could cause this feeling of raised anxiety and insecurity in new and unfamiliar surroundings (Langford & Clance, 1993).

Mallman (2016) explains that as well as vocational and part time issues, there can be a basic class distinction at play, suggesting that working-class students in particular struggle to fit in and adapt, using the legal term ‘inherent vice’ (a phrase borrowed from commercial law) as a useful phrase. This term proposes that such students may be ‘inferior’ in some way (Mallman, 2016: 1), or may lack confidence and see themselves as undeserving of a place at such middle-class institutions, viewing their new-found status as a ‘privilege, not an entitlement’ (Leathwood & O’Connell, 2003: 610). Kelly (2017) points out that BTEC students come predominantly from ‘disadvantaged’ and lower socio-economic backgrounds. According to UCAS figures for 2012–2013, almost one fifth come from areas of the lowest university applications and approximately 40% from homes where this was the first member of the family to go to university. This is markedly different from the traditional A-level student (Kelly, 2017: 12; Rouncefield-Swales, 2017).

Whilst many may proudly draw on their working-class upbringing as a source of inspiration or motivation, some may experience an initial struggle, however many will eventually conquer or suppress such negative feelings (Lehman, 2009; Mallman, 2016). It could be minor issues, such as how they speak (regional accents), poor articulation or feeling they cannot contribute to the discussion (Aries & Seider, 2005: 426–427) or there could be a ‘dislocation’ between their past and the present increasing anxiety (Aries & Seider, 2005: 419). Addressing this dislocation from your past to your present is particularly difficult for vocational students, and may result in low confidence and reduced aspiration (Jetton et al., 2007: 868), and could logically be applied to those students coming from an offending background. Mallman’s psychosocial study looks at life-stories of 29 working-class students in Australia, who, because of gaining a degree qualification, went on to live middle-class lifestyles. Participants talked repeatedly about anxiety, about being surrounded by people who were not like them and immersed in an unfamiliar place, feeling like a ‘fraud’ - one participant said that, coming out

as gay was less stressful than being at university and the stark realisation of 'rich and poor' and 'privilege and non-privilege' (Mallman, 2016: 11).

Bathmaker et al. (2013) suggest that a contemporary aim of going to HE is upward social mobility and their study looks at how students from different class backgrounds adapt and cope. They suggest that those with better knowledge of both 'knowing' and 'playing the game' have more chance of success (Bathmaker et al., 2013: 730), and that situation was generally better understood by those with the most capital, causing working-class students to be disadvantaged. Bourdieu's understanding is that those good players involved in the game will adapt and learn how to progress, such as taking internships or other extra-curricular activities (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Bourdieu, 1999). It has also been suggested that HE institutions (particularly pre-1992) may look at vocational entry students through a particularly 'pompous, prejudicial lens' based on social class, a state that will not see the situation improve (Hyland, 2002: 288). Indeed, there is a belief that unless universities actively do something, the structural issues that non-traditional students face will continue and therefore it is important and necessary for universities to decide what they should do about dealing with this gap in both skills and social status (Leese, 2010; Peake, 2018).

Bourdieu (1984) and Goffman (1959) are commonly cited authors in many articles on this theme, with the Bourdieusian theory of social capital discussing social mobility and expectations deeply engrained in discussion. Many writers refer to Goffman's classic 'presentation of the self in everyday life' the enduring 'dramaturgical' theory that we adapt our persona, appearance, and interactions to suit a specific environment (Goffman, 1959). Although quite dated, both theories have something to say regarding this transition to university.

In striving for improved social status and mobility, working-class students need to negotiate a series of challenges and preconceptions in making the transition to HE, having to overcome the 'natural superiority' of those from middle-class backgrounds (Mallman, 2016: 3). Bourdieu suggests that vocational student have a predetermined set of cards, mostly detrimental and emanating from their low socio-economic standing and are dealt equally poor cards on arrival at university (Bourdieu, 1984). In my own research, whereby I undertook a focus group of

criminology students from the BTEC route, it was clear that the students felt that they were less deserving of their place and that those from more traditional routes would fare better. They perceived that BTEC students and courses were seen as inferior and this adds to the challenges of the transition (Peake, 2018).

Bourdieu's idea of social and cultural capital and social mobility are grounded in social reproduction and to an extent, symbolic power. This work emphasises structural inequalities and restricted access to HE institutions is a major barrier to upward mobility, but these issues continue to perpetuate unless addressed, particularly in areas of gender, ethnicity and of course, social class (Bourdieu, 1984). Reay et al. (2009) align with Bourdieusian theory and recognise the 'fish out of water' scenario that non-traditional students face. The 'insecurity and uncertainty' encountered on arrival that becomes confusing and results in an unsuitable or maybe 'working-class' habitus, suggesting it should be no surprise that lower class students would struggle and there needs to be some form of intervention (Reay et al., 2009: 1105, 2010).

The Skills Deficit and the 'Ideal' Student

From experience, lecturers expect students to be prepared, to have appropriate skills for degree level on arrival and then to engage with learning. They promote attendance at lectures and seminars and instil a desire in the student to be challenged academically. Many will recognise this idealistic student profile but will also realise that in most universities it is unrealistic and less common than staff would believe. Wong and Chiu (2018) discuss the 'ideal student' and how we need to understand the changes to students coming to university, suggesting that the 'traditional' student may well be a fading phenomenon. They rightly point out that this could be a 'contentious' concept and are not suggesting it is describing the best performing or 'perfect' student academically, but more about the expectations of the teaching staff (Wong & Chiu, 2018: 2).

Wong and Chiu (2018) argue that lecturers have constructed this profile themselves and it succinctly sums up the findings from their

insightful research interviews with 30 social science lecturers from two post-92 universities in the London area. Issues such as ‘personal skillsets’, ‘preparation’ and ‘engagement’ became prevalent themes. Critical thought and analysis were also seen as important, particularly as studies progress, certainly by the final year. Surprisingly, several lecturers interviewed did not believe attainment/grades were the most important outcome (Wong & Chiu, 2018: 6). Bloom et al. (2013) further examines how the student learning experience is affected by staff expectations and introduces the concept of ‘appreciative education’, where more traditional issues such as attrition and successful outcomes are not considered the most important aspects of teaching in the classroom. The aim should be to help students achieve and realise their full potential through positive learning and teaching interactions, with staff and students working together to ‘challenge each other’ (Bloom et al., 2013: 5).

Whilst not linked to the demographics of students, Francis and McDonald (2009) provide a further insight into the issues with part time students studying law, the difficulty of transitioning, but also continuing frustrations throughout the degree due to their part time status, leading to a lack of ‘equivalency’, suggesting that equality may not be the preferred aim, but equity may be a more just outcome. Entry qualifications may be equivalent on paper, but the educational experiences and practices to this point may have been very different and non-traditional students are vulnerable to the workload and standard of this level of study (Francis & McDonald, 2009: 220). In sum, there is no ‘ideal’ student, each person who arrives is an individual and for those from non-A-level backgrounds, the transition may be more difficult, any deficits may need to be overcome, but it is achievable.

How students are received at university is key in the transition process. Hultberg et al. (2008) draw attention to this and suggest that universities, including academic staff, need to pay attention to the needs of non-A-level students right from the start, take note of any differences in prior learning and that the lack of academic skills (particularly from vocational entry students) becomes ‘terrifyingly apparent’ soon after arrival and inhibits the settling in phase (Hultberg et al., 2008: 49). Briggs et al. (2012) suggest that BTEC students struggle not only due to a lack of preparation for HE, but also a lack of suitable advice on what to expect

and the skills required to succeed. They also suggest that students from BAME minority backgrounds may also have issues with the transition to HE, in trying to overcome the 'grave social displacement' that such a notable change in lifestyle and environment may cause (Briggs et al., 2012: 3). Following a decade of innovative research and writing on transitions, this was probably the first noted study suggesting that there needs to be some form of positive intervention to smooth the transition from FE vocational studies to HE.

The message from academic literature is that students from vocational training routes attain lower degree outcomes as they struggle with the basic academic skills required to study at this higher level (Peake, 2018; Shields & Masardo, 2015). Vocational programmes of study are (quite properly) preparing students for the workplace and not for academic study, that is the point of such work-based programmes. Most vocational course designs and syllabuses reflect this. This is not the fault of the student, who takes the vocational qualification as it is taught at a Further Education (FE) college with a view to employment on completion, but this can become problematic if the student subsequently decides to change direction and apply to go to university, rather than move to the career destination in the workplace. Unintentionally, due to the change of progression, the student now has a skills deficit and is not prepared for the rigours of academic study. Indeed, some vocational students lack quite basic academic skills, such as essay writing and independent learning.

Hatt and Baxter (2003) highlighted that transition to university from the vocational route was fraught with difficulty, predominantly caused by a mismatch of skills and as more recent research has confirmed, the final degree classification was significantly lower than that of A-level students, with vocational students feeling 'poorly prepared' (Hatt & Baxter, 2003: 27). It was recognised that in further education colleges, vocational students were usually taught in large groups, with some assessments taken as group projects, with peer feedback playing a large part, a much more informal process. Because of the dominance of group work and classroom work, there was also not much independent study, something the degree student really needs to master as soon as the programme commences. Critical thinking and critical writing were not part of the

BTEC assessment process and there was little or no use of academic evidence or analysis in essays. Neither was there any referencing and therefore, the students were unprepared for the academic rigours of degree-level essay writing. Access and foundation students were much better prepared, learning most of the appropriate academic skills on their programme, including essay writing, analysis, and critical thought (Hatt & Baxter, 2003).

Deficits and Links to Attrition

Kelly (2017) in a report for the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) discusses the poor attrition rate for BTEC students generally, pointing to the fact according to the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) data for 2013, approximately one third of BTEC entry students did not complete their programme of study, in comparison the failure rate for A-level students was lower than 10%. This suggests that BTEC students are not sufficiently prepared for the rigours of degree courses and this 'limit progression' (Kelly, 2017: 7; Rouncefield-Swales, 2017), an early indication that deficits can inhibit progress.

In looking at non-A-level routes into degree-level criminology programmes, a report from the Higher Education Academy (HEA) (Shields & Masardo, 2015) noted that by measures of final classification and levels of attrition, students from non-traditional routes of entry fare less well at degree level than A-level students. When using the classification of upper second class (2:1) an arbitrary gauge of a successful outcome or suggested 'benchmark' of success, the difference in attainment measured by final degree classification was significantly and consistently lower for non-A-level entrants.

In a study at the University of Leeds (Peake, 2018), almost all BTEC entry students graduating from the Criminal Justice and Criminology programme in 2015 and 2016 gained a 2–2 classification or lower, some gained an ordinary/unclassified degree. Additionally, some spent periods as external students retaking assessments, and some left the programme altogether. If it is simply accepted that such students will naturally do less well than traditional A-level students, find it difficult to assimilate and

struggle with their studies, leading to a lower degree classification, then these poorer outcomes will occur and perpetuate year on year. Alternatively, some quite simple practical measures can be put in place to target help and improve outcomes (Peake, 2018). It could be argued of course, that a student who struggled with secondary education, managed to get a place at a college on a vocational or access course, then gains any classification of degree, has still attained a successful outcome. Success here may be relative.

Completion rates and achievement were measured, although the sample was small and not representative, the results were startling with only 48% of students with vocational qualifications (NVQ/BTEC) completing their degree programme, the figure rose to 61% for access students and 73% for A-level students. Only 23% of vocational students gained a 'good' degree (Hatt & Baxter, 2003: 25). Shields & Masardo point to a link between vocational education and social class, namely the 'low socio-economic standing' for BTEC students. For working-class students, vocational training is probably a natural attraction, with the expectation of good quality, paid employment as the goal and a university place not seen as beneficial or achievable (Shields & Masardo, 2017: 4).

Addressing Social, Cultural and Skills Deficits

It is recommended that both academic personal tutors and university departments be made fully aware of routes of entry and the background of students on arrival. The more information is shared then the earlier the conversation can begin, with more being put in place to smooth the transition to degree studies, raise aspiration, reduce attrition, and improve outcomes (Peake, 2018).

Regular meetings and an open-door policy can be particularly useful, as can mentoring schemes. Traditional peer mentoring schemes are tried and tested, they encourage a solid relationship and can give a struggling student an outlet to ask for help away from the worry of approaching staff. Mentoring with a staff-student pairing is hierarchical and can be difficult to develop unless the mentee is particularly comfortable

with approaching the staff mentor (Morris, 2017). More innovative schemes, such as 'reverse mentoring' can further help to firm that relationship and make it more open and accessible. Reverse mentoring looks to change the traditional tutor-tutee dynamics by reversing the role, with students finding out more about their tutor in the reciprocal information exchange. This is particularly useful with a diverse student body, including the ever-increasing number of international students (O'Connor, 2022). This makes the process much more informal and accessible to the mentee, who should feel the relationship becomes less of a power dynamic (Morris, 2017) and much more of a partnership.

Following the study of BTEC students in the School of Law, University of Leeds, a toolkit was put in place to assist transition, help with the settling in process and check the progress of these students academically (Peake, 2018: 92). It advocates pre-arrival communication with the students (email/video) to help reassure them and reduce anxiety, this could involve a summer school if desired, and if this were felt appropriate. On arrival at university in an induction week, an early meeting with an academic personal tutor needs to take place, to start the dialogue needed to build the relationship, so the student feels comfortable asking for help. Building a good rapport means that help can be requested expediently and be targeted to maximise the impact. The toolkit suggests more frequent tutor meetings with these students, as often as weekly in the first year, and additional sessions to discuss skills training as required. If these stages are not implemented at the start the relationship may not be effective, or may not materialise at all, and the problems for the student exacerbate and could be one of the main reasons students may leave their programme of study.

Since implementing the toolkit in my criminology department in 2017 (School of Law, University of Leeds), I am responsible for tutoring all students from the BTEC route and the first meeting is a group meeting (in induction week). At this meeting, my research on raising the achievement of BTEC entry students is shared and the potential deficits explained. This gives the students a clear understanding of the issues they may face and explains how we can help alleviate this and make the transition easier. Having that positive contact from day one, can make the students more comfortable, the positive rapport encourages

the student to ask for help if they need it, rather than not engage. For example, a student who is having issues academically, can raise concerns with the academic personal tutor, who can help personally or suggest where that help can be obtained. Many will argue that this should happen anyway (and I would agree), but personal experience tells me that students who are struggling to assimilate and then find they have an issue with academic skills are far less likely to seek that support. This clear line of communication, a more informal relationship and more frequent meetings can really help.

The toolkit may appear straightforward, and some parts may even seem too obvious or simplistic, but that relationship building from the start is absolutely the key. Bridging the 'skills gap' is equally important, if the skills deficit is not identified and addressed, it may cause problems in the first year and may well continue into subsequent years of study. Without this early intervention, and a good relationship with staff, it may not even get that far, attrition rates are the highest for BTEC students in the first year of university, as many struggle to transition and adapt (Peake, 2018: 92). Students from non-traditional routes of entry who may have some of these deficits are invited to meetings more frequently (ideally monthly, or as required) and skills training put in place where appropriate.

Since implementing the toolkit in my department in 2016, attrition rates have fallen to almost zero for BTEC entrants and there is no longer an academic 'ceiling' of a 2–2 classification. All the BTEC entrants (between 5 and 10 each year) have attained 2–1 on the BA (Hons) programme and three students have attained a first-class degree, not something achieved on our degree programme by this student type prior to 2016. Several have gone on to enrol on postgraduate programmes. The idea may be simple, the toolkit straightforward, but the results have been incredibly positive in raising both achievement and ambition in students from non-A-level routes.

Alongside the role of academic tutors and mentor, other strategies to recognise diversity and enhance inclusion can be developed in the teaching spaces. There are localised versions of education guides to teaching seminars and coping in the classroom; they usually involve setting out ground rules, giving way and allowing others to speak,

tempering language, and offering time-outs if things become heated or difficult. Most guides do include 'recognising diversity' but do not really give clear guidance of how that would work in practice, this becomes more difficult if the seminar leader is inadequately trained or inexperienced in the classroom. The Derek Bok Centre for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University call this 'managing hot moments in the classroom' and remind us that seminars should not become chaotic situations or battles, they ought to be facilitated and managed by the seminar leader/convenor. There can be a short-term solution (pause) and a longer-term solution (reflection) to inappropriate behaviours (Derek Bok Center, 1975).

Students bring their experiences with them to groups and this often proves to be a valuable start of discussion and can sometimes be controversial. This should not be viewed as negative in the context of these learning environments where discussion is promoted. However, students with experience of imprisonment or offending need to be tempered, for example, listening in a seminar to a former prisoner recall how much a 'cellmate' suffered with his mental health and consequently, openly self-harmed regularly with a blade until he bled profusely is an interesting insight, but if it causes distress to any of the group, it may be a little too graphic. From experience, ex-prisoners and criminal justice practitioners are often heard to interject with 'from experience...', which can be a useful discussion starter and insightful for other members of the group but should not distract from the main topic under discussion. Elsewhere in this edited collection, Sercombe et al. discuss the importance of students having the opportunity to hear these experiences, and the transformative learning experience they can offer.

Former prisoners are welcome at most universities, although some might feel slightly aggrieved at having to make declarations of their offence in some circumstances (not all universities require this). This would undoubtedly make the transition to university difficult, and traumatic for some, but a research study in the USA by Binnall et al. (2021) not only acknowledges this difficult transition, but goes further, looking at the inclusion of ex-prisoners from the perspective of the fellow students in the classroom. It was found that these students and other campus stakeholders may benefit from having ex-prisoners in their

classes and on their programme. Fellow students may develop a sense of understanding of the ex-offender's situation and their personal experience of criminal behaviour, subsequent incarceration, and re-entry into society via education and as a corollary, see progress in their personal development (Binnall et al., 2021: 2).

Conclusion

A thread running through this chapter is the notion that a point often made to students on entering a degree programme is that everyone is 'equal' and all start at the same point. For many, this is somehow reassuring, and it could be argued that it is a laudable aim to treat everyone as equal, regardless of background, gender, ethnicity, or route of entry. However, whilst it may promote *equality*, it is clearly not *equitable* and the two are quite different, being more equitable would attend to the needs of the individual (Peake, 2018). As students come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, have varied social skills, and have different academic qualifications, students are clearly not equal on arrival and that inequality can compound as their studies progress. In addition to the many different routes of entry, in the discipline of criminology, there is often a mix of former offenders and former or potential criminal justice practitioners.

The literature clearly demonstrates that the problem is not new, but there has been insufficient action taken to address some inequalities, with the issue of route of entry not identified until quite recently. It needs to be recognised as being just as influential as other forms of diversity that are recognised, such as gender, ethnicity, or disability. It could be argued that a small amount of attrition or poorer performance is often seen as acceptable, a natural consequence of how applied students become during their studies. WP schemes are a shining light, allowing many to go to university who otherwise may not, but this can be compromised if ongoing support is not provided. If attrition rates are high and attainment is lower than average, then success could certainly be viewed as limited, although may be seen as a positive initiative, but unless those

students make positive progress and the necessary support is put in place, it can have the opposite effect (Peake, 2018).

In the spirit of WP, an essential aim is to welcome all students from a variety of backgrounds and routes of entry, but in doing so, tutors need to appreciate that the skillset and previous experiences of education. This may require staff to be more involved in assisting students to settle in to this new and challenging environment, and to ensure the basic academic skills required for success are taught on arrival (Peake, 2018). Helping with this sometimes uncertain and difficult transition, and knowing as much as you can about your students is the key to promoting success, raising self-esteem, and reducing attrition.

In trying to solve the social and cultural deficits, universities first need to recognise the varied student types and the effect their diversity may have on transitioning to HE. Supportive and inclusive induction programmes, including social events are a useful starting point. Close rapport with staff, particularly the academic personal tutor, is vital. Closing the gap will only happen if that initial welcome promotes inclusivity and part of that needs to be a recognition of the route of entry and background of the student. Only with such interventions, will such a diverse body of learners settle into higher-level university studies, be productive in the classroom and achieve their full potential.

Top Tips: Promoting Inclusion in Criminology Cohorts

- As an academic personal tutor, find out about your students, talk with them, discuss their background, qualifications, etc. Reassure them they are a valued member of the cohort.
- As a seminar leader, be aware who is in your class and offer to speak with any student who feels anxious for a particular reason, such as being a victim of crime or a former prisoner (trigger point).
- In group teaching and discussion, use the diverse mix of students to your advantage, see diversity as a positive dynamic.

- Use a toolkit to monitor the progress of students from non-traditional backgrounds, so help can be targeted around skills and personal development.
- Make induction week inclusive, and encourage students to mix and support each other, in and out of the classroom.

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