Alumni Networking: Career-building with Keele undergraduates in the School of Sociology and Criminology, March 2014

A group of alumni in Sociology and Criminology returned to Keele University for an event on 19th March in Keele Hall and KUSU, to provide career-building advice and support to more than 30 current undergraduates. Students in all years of Sociology or Criminology benefited from a full day of career planning, including sessions to build their networking skills, which they later put into action with our alumni visitors. A wide range of routes were represented by our alumni group, who work in housing, charity PR, project management, community safety, crime prevention and probation, policing and in executive coaching.

Students were extremely grateful for the opportunity to build networks and to work on their own employability, advised by those who know exactly what it is like to be an undergraduate at Keele. Students came away from the day with a wider range of career options, and direct experience of professional networking and with offers of further career support from alumni.

Visiting alumni commented on how fresh and committed they found our students, and how much they enjoyed the opportunity to be invited back to Keele. In addition to a nostalgic visit to KUSU, they also enjoyed a tour of the revamped central campus from a Student Ambassador.

The Alumni Career networking event was the second such event organised by Dr Rebecca Leach in the School of Sociology & Criminology, supported by the Alumni and Careers offices, and has provided a model for employability and alumni engagement that is being taken up by other Schools. John Easom from the Alumni Office said “we cite your 2013 event as a good example for others to follow, and they are beginning to do it. We learned a lot from it...”
Feedback from alumni from 2013 and 2014 events:

Stephen Barber (Sociology & Politics, 2006), ITV Programme Publicity Officer: “It was a pleasure. Your hospitality was fantastic and much appreciated. I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience and think it’s a great step in the right direction”

Nick Hammond (Sociology & Applied Social Studies, 1977), Foreign National Offenders Lead, NOMS/London Probation Service: “Congratulations on a stimulating and interesting session… It was my pleasure to join you and I thought the ‘speed networking’ worked very well indeed. …I would be happy to do it again.”

Sophie Lawler-Hall (Sociology & Politics, 2000), Executive Director, Fitness First: “Was a pleasure. Look forward to supporting you more in future”

Peter Merry (Law with Sociology, 1995), Head of Criminal Justice and Custody for Warwickshire Police and West Mercia Police: “Can I please start with a massive thank you for the invite and a personal thank you to you for all your hard work and effort - from where I was sitting/standing it certainly paid off and made it a very valuable event for us alumni, let alone our student colleagues.”

Alice Stapleton (Criminology & Psychology, 2004): Project Manager, Legal Services and owner of Coaching business: “The clients I coach always talk about the value of speaking to professionals in the industry they want to get in to so I always feel these events are important to hold. You did a great job. … I look forward to staying in touch and returning to Keele again in the future. It really is a great university and it’s lovely to see teachers and career teams putting such effort in to the future lives of their students.”
Feedback from students:
24 students out of 31 attending submitted feedback and all of those students said they would recommend the event to other students, with a large proportion adding ‘most definitely!’ or ‘it was incredibly valuable’. Students regarded the opportunity to network with alumni as by far the most useful part of the day, although many appreciated the training in networking skills beforehand! As well as realising the importance of networking, the two other things that were learned were the advantages of volunteering and work experience, and the opening of their eyes onto the range of different kinds of job titles and routes into work. More than 2/3 of the students came away with a clear offer of further contact with the alumni, such as contact via LinkedIn, mentoring or further information about their field.

Qualitative feedback was entirely positive, with the only real questions about holding it earlier in the academic year, and students wanting a longer day!

Here is what they had to say:

- “Enjoyed the day: very informative! Gained confidence and new knowledge about the importance of social networking. Overall VERY GOOD!”
- “This was a great event”
- "Very informative day, enjoyable as well. Thank you for this opportunity!" 
- "Really enjoyed it, it was very informative & gave us great insight into future careers and how to get there from our undergraduate degree."
- "Loved the event, found it useful. Should be open to more departments!"
- "The alumni ...were very approachable and gave very constructive and helpful advice!"
- "All in all a very helpful day. Personally this has helped me think more about further career opportunities and how to gain further experience. All of the staff and alumni were willing and active in discussion... I hope that the event continues in years to come and hopefully at some point in my professional life I will be able to share my own advice and experiences with undergraduate students."
- "[This] should be implemented across all the different Schools as it gave valuable information that you wouldn't normally receive and key contacts for the future."
- "Very helpful for those of us who do not yet have a career path planned out - I learned a lot."
For more information, please contact

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Alumni and current students in Keele Hall