

Thursday, 5 May 2011

[Keele: \(Virtually\) a Top 20 place for Sociology and Criminology](#)

Wow. Our rating for Sociology in the Complete University guide has moved up a whole 9 places, moving us into 21st spot. This is fantastic news and is no doubt partly due to the brilliant feedback we've been getting in the National Student Survey over the years.

Criminology (included as Social Policy - see below for why) is also in 20th place, so I think this means we can just about claim we're in the Top 20 of places in which to study both subjects. Well, *almost*.

But while we're on, just a note about League Tables. Sure, they help you decide where you want to study; sure, they tell you a bit about the places you're interested in, and their reputation. But nothing really beats coming for a visit, talking to staff and students about what is important to you. Our Open Days are just that: open - you can speak to staff and students of the two programmes first hand to find out what it is really like.

One of the things about League Tables that makes a difference to us here at Keele is they can never have a 'perfect' methodology. It matters, in fact, because the clumsiness of the methodology doesn't always show us in our best light. For example, the National Student Survey only asks you ONE set of questions; yet still many if not most of our degrees at Keele are dual honours. Unless you've had EXACTLY the same experience in both your Schools, this fine-tuning of your views won't be reflected in your answers. There has yet to be any form of league table or 'rating' of University courses that can adequately reflect the Keele degree properly.

In addition, people often ask about the research rating for our subjects, since it is confusing. In some league tables you will see NO research rating for Sociology and/or Criminology. In others you will see we end up at the top end of the ratings! Sometimes, I've seen blogs, facebook comments and replies on The Student Room which highlight or question this. Why does this confusion arise?

Well, it is all to do with HOW research was assessed at Keele. Most of the School of Sociology and Criminology staff whose research was included in the last Research Assessment exercise (a process by which the quality of research in Universities is measured every few years) were submitted under the heading of 'Social Policy'. There isn't a separate 'Criminology' heading, and most of the sociologists (which was most of us) who were submitted went in Social Policy, which is quite common across the country. I won't bore you with the reasons these choices were made but you can rest assured that ALL staff in the School are research active. [Keele was ranked 12th in the country for Social Policy](#) - an excellent outcome- and criminology and sociology research in our School contributed to this along with research by members of other Schools (such as Public Policy and Professional Practice).

Now, some league tables have managed to reflect this complexity accurately, and have included part of the Social Policy score in their calculations for Sociology and Criminology. But some have not. So if it shows up a research score of 'zero', then take it with a pinch of salt. If you want to know what kind of research we actually do, and how good it is, look at the list of books on our Facebook page, the publications and research details on our individual homepages and so on.

The real issue in the league tables though is surely how good we are as educators, how much students appreciate what they get from us when they're here, and what difference it makes to them in the long term - in terms of employability and just general life-changing experiences. Hopefully, these rather arbitrary measures can get better at reflecting what you really get in the School of Sociology and Criminology: excellent, research-active teaching staff, who know and care about their students, teaching relevant and interesting courses that help develop you into all-round graduates.