



# Target recruitment for under-represented groups in Social Policy and Criminology

*Dr Majella Kelkey*

Department of Comparative & Applied Social Sciences  
University of Hull  
Cottingham Road  
Hull HU6 7RX  
United Kingdom  
Tel: 01482 466083  
m.m.kilkey@hull.ac.uk

## Project aims:

- Encourage FE students to identify Social Policy in HE (and in particular Social Policy and Criminology course) as one of their post-FE options.
- Enable the Social Policy and Criminology unit to identify the key concerns and information needs of FE students and to develop provision of advice and guidance to overcome barriers relating to recruitment.
- Foster and seek to raise aspirations amongst groups under-represented in HE.

## Issues

- Falling numbers in Social Policy
- Missing out on 16-18 yr old market who knows little about the subject including:
  - What the course covers
  - What A level subjects are suitable for an introduction to the programmes
  - What careers can be undertaken as a result
- Social Policy tends to attract mature and/or part-time students who have done short courses and foundation awards in relevant areas. They either know more about social policy and/or want to pursue/develop/change careers into this area.
- Criminology at Hull, which nationally is a top selling course, is facing increasing competition from other universities.
- Possible options
  - Providing input into Citizenship for FE Colleges and schools to help teachers who have to cover the subject.
  - Offering a modified Social Policy programme which will direct people into Housing as a career
  - Offering the programmes 'with' e.g. Psychology and Law

## Objectives

Identified by the University of Hull's Marketing Department

1. To identify the unique selling points of these key subject areas
2. Undertake desk research to help develop the Marketing Strategy for the Department.
3. Undertake telephone research amongst Teachers, Careers Advisers and Employers to identify how Hull can create awareness and interest in Social Policy (& Criminology) amongst 16-18 yr olds.
4. To develop promotional message that explain Social Policy (& Criminology) in a language that 16-18 yr olds can understand and appreciate.

## Commentary on activities

### 1. Desk research

- Desk research is a low cost activity.
- Corporate Systems can run a report profiling Hull Social Policy & Criminology students over the last five years. It could also be worth talking to Careers to find out the statistics held on both students going into employment and current climate of different careers in the UK/overseas.
- Data can be purchased from HEFCE at approx £50 per application trends for Social Policy & Criminology amongst 16-18 yr old students in the country and what A level subjects they took. This could help identify regional differences.
- Focus groups with existing students will find out why they chose to study Social Policy (Criminology) and why they chose Hull. Students' ideas and opinions can be used to feedback into the planning and promotion of programmes, whether the Unique Selling Points are still appropriate, how things can be improved etc.
- As with Housing, see if there are other job gaps in the marketplace where the University could work jointly with Employers to promote Social Policy. Working with Employers will give impact to any marketing activities, may improve the opportunities of getting the department's name in front of teachers etc and offers possibilities of shared funding.
- Find out about any national or professional body initiatives in which Hull can become involved. Again it may be possible to implement these in schools, make use of existing work that has been undertaken and any marketing/PR activity.
- When conducting any research amongst teachers and careers advisers it would be useful to ask them if they would be willing to pilot ideas that may have been discussed before rolling them out to a wider audience.

### 2. Unique selling points

This is an exercise that can be carried out relatively swiftly and would involve tutors and students in the Social Policy department. Once these are defined it makes it much easier to know how to promote the programmes and to whom.

### 3. Capitalising on current activity

The Marketing & Communications (Marcomms) & PR teams can help by producing and placing news releases with the media throughout the year on the different activities. To ensure maximum interest, news releases work well if they include quotes from students and/or basic statistics e.g. "so many young people have been helped in Hull to do x by the Social Policy dept and are now doing y".

Existing students can be asked to act as endorsers of the programmes through comments included in literature, giving talks at their former school or (in the case of mature students) or original course undertaken. Former students now in the workplace can act as mentors for existing students to help them in their studies/career path and/or again go back to talk to schools.

This whole area of public relations can be implemented reasonably rapidly.

## Other ideas and opportunities

- Both Social Policy and Criminology tutors could offer themselves as local experts to the media (given appropriate training)! This may be undertaken already but again, dependant upon resources, it might be possible to get regular media coverage in this way. This can include offering opinion in the papers and on radio, being asked as a guest onto relevant shows and even doing phone-in at key times of the year for students! The main advantage of getting a good media profile is it costs time but not money; it gives the department/tutor a lot of credibility in the eyes of the students, teachers and parents.
- Carrying out a skills audit on the staff in the Department to identify specialist areas of expertise which are not readily available through the schools network and offer some form of Master classes/teaching aids for teachers.
- Build up a database of former students who might be willing to provide endorsements and/or give a talk to a local school/their old school on behalf of the University.

## Promotional messages

- Both the Department and Marcomms. should discuss they key messages that are promoted about its programmes and then match these to the target audiences. The messages need to be enduring so they can run for 1-2 years, which will help create instant recognition and interest in Social Policy & Criminology at Hull.
- Students will always need to be converted but if they are already aware of the reputation that Social Policy & Criminology at Hull has then the battle is half won.

## Promotional activity

- Create relevant materials that can be sent out to schools. This could include the poster, leaflet, taster sessions, competitions, newsletter etc.

## Reflections on recruitment strategy:

- Receipt of HEFCE-funded Widening Participation monies from the University has proven very beneficial. They have enabled activities such as:
  - Taster conferences
  - Sunday open-days, promoted as a 'family event'
  - The production of a FAQ leaflet by two of our former students
  - Visits to local FE colleges
- Instinctively we (HE teachers of Social Policy and Criminology) have resisted some of the more marketing-oriented aspects of the strategy developed by the University's Marketing and Communications team. Inherent in this is the tendency to see the job as one of a 'sales-person', 'selling' a 'product' to 'customers'.
- Other aspects of the strategy might be valuable, such as identifying the geography of our catchment area, and targeting schools and colleges there, as well as the areas from which we currently don't recruit.
- The strategy, though, does not give much discussion as to what the nature of that targeting should be. It seems to be suggesting a mail shot. But how productive is this? Anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers receive too much post and bin a lot of it, especially if it is not addressed to them individually.

- More productive targeting probably involves establishing an individual relationship with school and college teachers. We are beginning to do this locally, especially at FE level, but it does require time, and it is difficult to be consistently active year on year, given other work commitments.
- The challenges for Social Policy and Criminology are different, and require different strategies. The demand for Criminology remains high, and our challenge is one of increased competition from other providers. The key task is, therefore, is promoting Criminology at Hull. But there is a need to stimulate demand and interest in Social Policy at a national level. This cannot just be left to staff in individual universities, but requires a collective strategy from the Social Policy community as a whole.



The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work (SWAP)  
University of Southampton School of Social Sciences  
Southampton  
SO17 1BJ



Printed on recycled paper