

Opportunities in Forensic Science

Dr Julie Mennell, University of Teesside

Establishment of a UK Forensic Science Education Group web-site, supported by the Higher Education Academy, forensic science users & providers and universities, which will provide careers information and advice to potential and current forensic science students.

Introduction

Forensic science has become an increasingly prominent area of interest in the last five years. This interest has seen a huge increase in the number of university courses in 'forensics', the number of students applying for these courses and, more importantly from a police and forensic science employer perspective, the number of applicants for each post advertised. There are now over four hundred and fifty university courses with 'forensic' in the title and there are no short term indications that this number will reduce in the future. Universities have been subjected to increasing criticism by MPs and forensic science employers in relation to this proliferation of 'forensic' degrees. Recent reports, including the Science, Engineering, Manufacturing and Technology Alliance (SEMTA) Sector Skills body report and the 2005 Science and Technology Committee report, Forensic Science on Trial have highlighted employers concerns in relation to standards, student expectations, graduate skills and employment prospects.

UK Forensic Science Education Group (UKFSEG)

The University of Teesside's Centre for Forensic Investigation has lead the establishment of the UK Forensic Science Education Group (UKFSEG) comprising the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the Home Office Forensic Science & Pathology Unit, Forensic Science Service, Scottish Forensic Science Service, Northern Ireland Forensic Service, LGC Forensics, Centrex NTC, Metropolitan Police Service, Strathclyde Police, Derbyshire Police, Cleveland Police, the Forensic Science Society, Higher Education Academy, Physical Sciences Centre and, in the first instance, the Universities of King's College, Strathclyde, Glamorgan, Bradford, Anglia Ruskin, Staffordshire, Central Lancashire, Northumbria, Lincoln and Abertay.

The group has been established to:

encourage links with forensic science employers and academia.

establish forensic science employer Higher Education (HE) requirements and priorities for new and existing staff by agreeing a framework for forensic science users and providers to work collaboratively with HE to influence the design, content and delivery of courses to ensure graduates are well equipped to meet the needs of the forensic science community.

identify and influence forensic science degree courses. Working with forensic science users and providers to identify key priority areas for the future such as Crime Scene Science and Digital Forensics

The group aims to promote recognisable and relevant degrees in 'forensic practice' forensic science user & providers with a pool of high quality graduates to recruit from; undergraduates and postgraduates with realistic career expectations and opportunities; and a framework of HE professional development activities for forensic practitioners. In achieving these aims, the group will also complement the work of existing organisations such as the Forensic Science Society, Higher Education Academy Physical Sciences Centre and the ACPO Forensic Science Sector Training Strategy Group.

The first meeting of the group took place on February 22, 2006 at the University of Teesside and it was agreed that a UKFSEG web-site should be established which would:

focus on informing current and potential forensic science students of future career opportunities available

highlight the significance of course type choice in influencing future career opportunities

clarify the roles of forensic science practitioners.

not attempt to provide information that might be construed as making judgements on courses but act as a point of reference for those enquiring about specific roles and course types in forensic science e.g. a point of reference for enquiries made to the police.

promote forensic science conferences and workshops for students, academics and forensic practitioners

contains links to members' own websites

disseminate the work of the UKFSEG and encourage new members to join

be established as a pilot by the Centre for Forensic Investigation

be set up separately from the University of Teesside and have its own domain name e.g. UKFSEG.org.

HEA Project

UKFSEG, with the Centre for Forensic Investigation, University of Teesside as the lead partner, would like to apply to the HEA Physical Science Centre Development fund to enable the above web-site to be established and developed.

In addition, to further ensure that the information provided on the site represents and is seen to represent the collective views of a majority of Higher Education Institutes (as well as forensic science users & providers) and encourages new UKFSEG members it would be beneficial for the UKFSEG web-site to be sited on the HEA web-site.

The outputs of this project will comprise:

A Centre for Forensic Investigation report, which will provide a summary of forensic course types, career opportunities and entry requirements together with current information & advice sources available. This will then be used to influence the proposed framework and content of the web-site.

A UK Forensic Science Education Group web-site which will meet the objectives of the UKFSEG (as given above). In particular:

provide potential and current forensic science students with comprehensive information and guidance re choosing a forensic science course and gaining employment

encourage links with forensic science employers and academia.

A journal paper. This paper will seek to present an up to date picture of HE forensic provision in the UK, employer requirements and the career opportunities available to forensic science students, within and outside of forensic science.

Dr Julie Mennell

Director, Centre for Forensic Investigation

School of Science & Technology

University of Teesside

Middlesbrough

Tees Valley

TS1 3BA

Tel: 01642 342404

E-mail: j.mennell@tees.ac.uk