

David Wilson, top UK criminologist: but the league table of Criminologists is rubbish

Professor David Wilson of Birmingham City University has topped a poll of criminologists for 2008. However, the author of the report himself has doubts about the methodology but believes that his work will spark debate on the practice of 'public criminology'.

In 2008 there were 171 mentions of criminologist and 287 of criminology (clearly with some overlap and some web only mentions) in all UK newspapers in LexisNexis (database searched on 12 June 2009). Some mentions of criminology were simply descriptors of students in stories (for instance, death of a glamour model, the organiser of a charity bike ride and a stabbing in London) or degree pass lists or clearing opportunities. Others were mentions that senior police officers had Masters in criminology. On which subject the Daily Mail (24 April 2008) argued, 'it is one of the paradoxes of modern policing that as senior officers have supposedly become better educated with their degrees in sociology and criminology from sometimes not very distinguished universities so they have become more detached from the communities they are supposed to serve'. The article was illustrated by a graphic of 'Dixon of Dock Green'. We also learned that an ex-prisoner was studying it; and even that Aston Villa manager Martin O'Neill had not finished his criminology studies at Queen's, Belfast before going into football.

Some mentions were simply of the 'criminologists say...' or a 'you don't have to have a degree in criminology to...' variety – citing no named criminologist - and others of foreign criminologists in foreign cases. Several previews of films or book reviews mentioned that a character was a criminologist; and an unnamed 'criminologist' is mentioned in all previews of Patsy Kensit's appearance on *Who do you think you are?* (BBC TV) assuring her about her father's connections with the Krays etc.

Again some of these mentions vary in their 'weight'. Thus Richard Kinsey's obituary appears in the *Halifax Courier* and John Croft's 85th birthday is marked by *The Times* and *The Guardian*. Howard Jones obituary by Mike Levi appeared in *The Guardian*. Also not uncommon were letters from criminologists or, more rarely, authored articles. Ian Loader's two separate authored pieces in *The Guardian* should be accorded considerable weight. Some were granted profiles (Roger Matthews by Julie Bindel in *The Guardian*). Perhaps these 'weights' might be calculated (5 points for authored article down to 2 for a letter and 1 a birthday?) but simple mentions have had to suffice here. However, even these have been 'weeded'.

Some mentions were not relevant to criminology. For instance, David Wilson chaired a charity event and Ken Smith of Bucks New University wrote to *The Higher* suggesting tolerance of student spelling and occasioned much coverage in response. Such mentions have not been counted. There were also a number of double counts for separate editions but removing all these and any Irish editions left a total of 137 mentions of UK or UK-based criminologists. Thirteen of these were in *The Higher* and mostly reviews or occasionally appointment news. Stripping those out and removing obits and

anniversaries left nearly 70 individual criminologists cited, however briefly, on crime and criminal justice issues. Very, very, occasionally more than one criminologist is mentioned in a story.

Some of those identified by the papers as criminologists might be well-known, such as author Colin Wilson and film-maker Roger Graef, but may not be considered by some to be echt criminologists. David Green of the right-wing thinktank Civitas is described as a criminologist by the papers but he is not so described on their website. Sometimes described as a criminologist – though not in 2008 – is Richard Garside. He is the Director of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies and had 20 mentions in 2008 (and about 200 in the past decade). These numbers would give him the number one spot and as an active researcher/campaigner with an overseeing responsibility for the *British Journal of Criminology* makes him a key 'player' in UK criminology.

However, his contributions were only found by making a search for him specifically. This list was solely collated from mentions of criminology/ist and includes all described as a criminologist or quoted in association with criminology teaching, research or institutions. It is a mark of the problems of the methodology that two mentions of Robert Reiner could only be found by searching on his name. Similar checks on Ben Bowling and Tim Newburn showed no newspaper mentions in 2008.

So apologies if your work has been missed. Sorry – but only a little – if the whole idea of a league table distresses you, but that is, in part, the idea. This is intended to raise the profile of criminology and particularly of those criminologists who ply some of their trade in public. We are all judged by our peers and the RAE/REF so here's something more to fret on. [*The Higher*](#) has it too that communicating to the public may feature in future assessments.

So how to succeed? Strong regional universities with a strong regional press presence certainly seem well-starred as do the 'Celtic' fringes: *The Scotsman* (5), *Western Mail* (7), *Belfast Telegraph* (6) and *Glasgow Herald* (5). A criminal event or the anniversary of an event provides an unlooked for 'opportunity'. A provocative or pithy comment may be repeated in other outlets. At 29 uses of 24 criminologists *The Guardian* leads the field.

The order below is generated by gross numbers. Where equal numbers of mentions are made the numbers of separate stories is used to break the tie with a wider spread of newspapers relevant too.

David Wilson is a clear leader with 16 mentions in 8 separate newspapers from a profile in the Scotsman on the release of his book on serial killers to two mentions of Open days at the University but also comments on 'canoe man', Josef Fritzl, girl gangs and alcohol etc. He also managed to sneak a mention of his own 'reality' TV show/experiment into an attack on the cruelty of Trinny and Sussannah in the *Daily Mail*.

Fergus McNeill merits four mentions (two in *Scotsman* one in each of *Glasgow Herald* and its Sunday edition) on 3 separate stories.

Marian Fitzgerald is cited in four papers over 2 stories (knife crime and crime stats). This makes her the highest ranked woman of the 16 cited.

Roger Graef's four mentions are on two stories across four papers but three harp back to his influential TV programme on the Police on rape.

Martin Gill is cited in three papers on 3 separate stories none of them about CCTV.

David Green's three mentions are all in the *Daily Mail* on 3 different stories running a 'conservative' line.

Reece Walters complaints about the use of criminological research were picked up by the *Guardian*, *Times* and *Scotsman* as well as *The Higher* (NB Tim Hope and Mike Hough also cited in one story).

Lawrence Sherman gets three mentions in the *Daily Telegraph*, *Independent* and *People* on Restorative Justice.

A further 12 were mentioned twice.

Alphabetically all those included in the research, but not mentioned above, are:

Arnull Elaine
Batchelor Susan
Casale Silvia
Colbran Marianne
Crewe Don
Downes David
Ellison Graham
Ferguson Neil
Finch Emily
Frondigoun Liz
Glynn Martin
Grounds Adrian
Hallsworth Simon
Hirschfield Alex
Hobbs Dick
Hudson Barbara
Keating Mike
Kiff Paul
Kilroe Mike
Lacey Nicola
Larkin John
Louks Nancy
MacKenzie Simon
Measham Fiona

Morgan Rod
Norris Gareth
Pearson Graeme
Philip Stenning
Phoenix Jo
Piacentini Laura
Radford Jill
Rawlinson Paddy
Reid Kiron
Rogerson Michele
Scraton Phil
Shirlow Pete
Spalek Basia
Sparks Richard
Taylor Laurie
Teague Michael
Tierney John
Treadwell James
Waiton Stuart
Walsh David
Warr Jason
West Donald
Westmarland Nicole
Whittington-Egan Richard
Wiles Paul
Williams Matthew
Williams-Thomas Mark
Wilson Andrew
Wyre Ray

Nic Groombridge is a Senior Lecturer at St Mary's University College where he teaches criminology and media. He has co-written with both David Wilson and Richard Garside. He has published on 'public criminology' and been quoted and misquoted by the press, broadcasting and new media in the past.