

CRIMINOLOGIST CORNER(ED)

The BSC's monthly interview with the great, the good and the... hoping for greatness

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Professor Philip Birch

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that I find compelling.

I began my career in the British Prison Service before moving into policy and research roles through the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. This included managing a Specialist Crime Unit overseeing services relating to domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, hate crime, and sex work. Working directly with offenders and victims exposed me to the realities of crime in a very tangible way. What you see and hear stays with you and shapes how you understand the world.

It is those professionals, police officers, prison officers, probation staff, and victim support workers, who continue to inspire me. Their practice informs everything I do as an academic, from the education programs I develop to the research I undertake.

What advice would you give to your undergraduate self?

Stay connected to practice and be proud of it. In academia, there can be a tendency to undervalue practice-based experience, but my experience has been the opposite. Those foundations are critical to understanding how criminology operates in the real world.

Criminology, for me, is an applied and translational discipline grounded in crime science principles and focused on evidence-based policy and practice - what works, and why. The most meaningful insights come from bridging theory and practice and engaging with real-world problems.

This approach has shaped my development of UTS Criminology, the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) is where I am currently based as Course Director and Chair of the Crime & Security Science Research Group. Since launching the undergraduate program in 2022, we have grown

rapidly, reflecting a strong emphasis on industry engagement and applied learning. It is something I would encourage my undergraduate self to embrace with confidence.

What work are you involved in at the moment?

My research centres on applied criminology, with a strong focus on developing evidence-based approaches that inform policy and frontline practice. Much of my work involves collaboration with criminal justice agencies.

Currently, I am leading several projects focused on policing and community safety, including police officer wellbeing. This includes a study with the Australian Federal Police examining trauma-informed policing and how officers understand and apply these approaches in practice. I am now developing academic outputs from this work. I am also leading a binational study across Australia and New Zealand examining assaults on police officers, a mixed-methods study to better understand the nature and impact of these incidents. Alongside this, I have been working with the Queensland Police Service on digital community safety, developing strategies to support safer and more inclusive online spaces.

A significant strand of my current work focuses on hate crime. I have worked with the New South Wales Police Force on this since 2018 and has developed into a broader programme of research and practice. This includes the development of one of the world's first dedicated hate crime education courses for police officers, which has trained over 300 officers and includes international participants. Through this work, I also developed the Bias Crime

Indicator Tool, which is being integrated into police practice. Most recently, I completed a global assessment of policing responses to hate crime, identifying international best practice. Collectively, this work continues to contribute to policy and operational developments.

What would you have done if you hadn't become a Criminologist?

I have always loved animals, so becoming a vet would have been an alternative path. I am also interested in neuroscience, particularly in understanding behaviour and responses to trauma - areas that intersect with my current work.

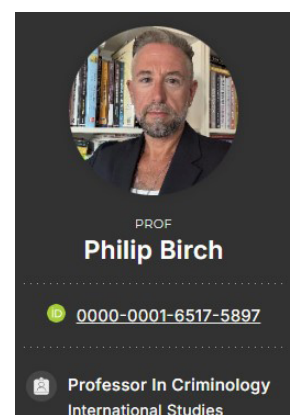
And finally, please share the Criminological book, album and luxury item you would take to your desert island.....

Book – A book by the late Professor David Farrington, whose work on life-course criminology has been a major influence on my thinking.

Album – Confessions on a Dance Floor by Madonna. A timeless album that captures a happy moment in my life.

Luxury Item – My Christian Dior sunglasses. Living in Australia has taught me the importance of good eye protection from the sun.

Read about Philip's work: here:



Where is home?

Home is Sydney, Australia, where I have been based since 2008. Originally from the UK, I now find myself somewhere between the two, personally and professionally shaped by both contexts. Sydney is where I have built my academic career, while the UK remains an important part of my identity.

How did you become a Criminologist?

I decided at the age of 13 that I wanted to become a probation officer. I remember watching the news and being struck by how offenders and victims were portrayed. I was drawn to the human side of crime and wanted to understand it better. From that point, I sought out opportunities to gain experience. At high school, I joined a Community Action Team, working with a local elderly residential area on small-scale crime prevention activities. I later volunteered in a homeless night shelter, where I was exposed to issues such as mental health and substance use.

Who/What inspires you?

I am most inspired by police and other criminal justice practitioners who work directly with crime, harm, and vulnerability. They operate in complex and often confronting environments, and it is their professionalism and commitment

next issue...

Dr Stephanie Fohring - Northumbria University & Chair BSC Victims Network