



Unlocking Opportunity: The Impact of a Criminal Record on Access to Higher Education.

Charlotte Brooks, PhD Researcher.
School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham.



What we'll cover today

- What is a criminal record?
- What do we currently know about how a criminal record impacts access to HE?
- How can **you** and **your institution** contribute to fairer admissions for people with criminal records?





University of
Nottingham

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

Reflection



What is a Criminal Record?

- A criminal record can refer to any interaction with the criminal justice system, e.g. fines, cautions, community sentences or prison sentences.
- Fines, which are given out for minor and first-time offences, make up over 70% of punishments given out each year.
- Of those people that are given a custodial sentence, approximately 70% have committed a non-violent crime.

In England and Wales there are over 11 million people with a criminal record.

That's 1 in 6 people!



Why is this Issue Important?

Social Justice - Everyone should have the opportunity to choose to access higher education if they wish. It is unjust and unproportionate to deny someone the opportunity to access education, for a crime they have already been punished for.

Supporting desistance from offending- Providing opportunities to access education enables people to learn, contribute to society, develop positive networks.

Widening Participation – Groups that are underrepresented within higher education are also more likely to be criminalised (see Lammy, 2017). Creating fairer admissions processes could contribute to WP.



Criminal Records and Applying to University

- Before 2018, all applicants applying through UCAS were required to disclose **unspent** criminal records on application.
- Since September 2018, only applicants to **regulated degrees** are required to disclose on application.
- Little is known about the process for applicants applying to PGT & PGR degrees as usually do not apply through UCAS.

BAN
THE
BOX



Are criminal records still a barrier?

- Many universities are still asking applicants to disclose **after** submitting their application.
- The processes for this seem to vary between institutions and can be complex.
- We need to learn more to better advise applicants if and when they will need to disclose their conviction and consider if admissions processes for people with criminal records are fair.





Dispelling the myths...

- No evidence that asking applicants to disclose their criminal records results in safer campuses (see Hughes et al., 2014).
- Universities are not legally required to oversee risk assessments for people with previous convictions for non-regulated degrees.
- No dichotomy between 'victims' and 'offenders' - many are/have been both.





What might applicants want to know?

1. Will I have to disclose my criminal record during the admissions process?
2. What information will I have to provide?
3. Will my criminal record restrict opportunities for placements or part-time work?
4. Will I be required to disclose my criminal when applying for a place in university accommodation?
5. Will I be required to disclose my criminal record on registration or enrolment?
6. Will information about my criminal record be shared with academics in my department or other students?



How can you make a difference? - The Basics

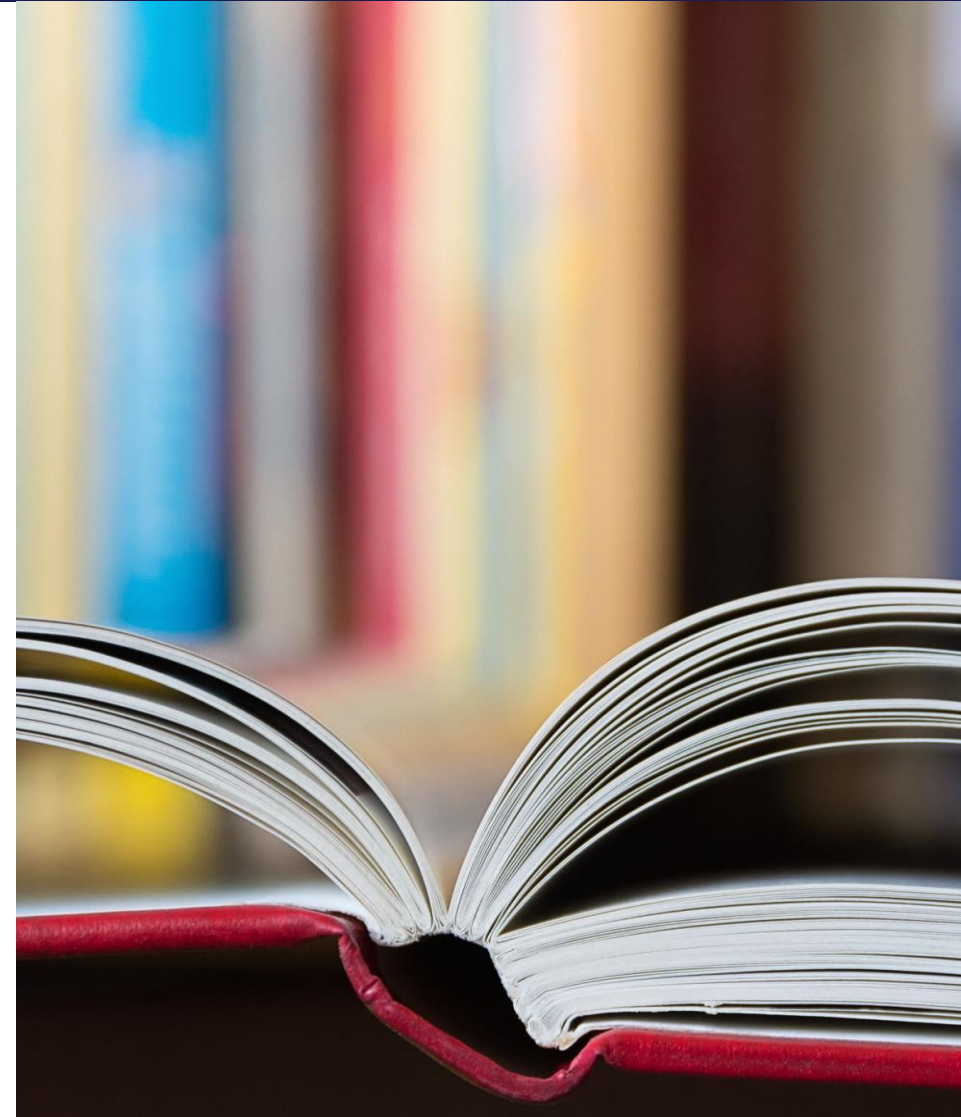
- 'People with criminal record', rather than 'ex-offenders'.
- Avoid asking why or how they got their criminal record.
- Be encouraging
- Criminal records disclosures are 'special category data'. This information is confidential and should only be shared on a 'need to know' basis.





Doing your Research...

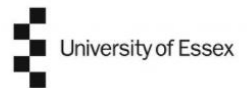
- Learn the process for criminal record disclosures at your university.
- Learn the difference between a 'spent' and 'unspent' conviction- this advice will ensure an applicant doesn't over disclose.
- Applicants may be concerned about speaking to a university directly about their criminal record. Signpost them to organisations like Unlock, NACRO or Prisoners Education Trust for support.





How can your institution make a difference?

- Commit to the Fair Chance Pledge!
- Explore the fair admissions toolkit.
- Encourage colleagues to attend training to understand how to make fair judgements about CRs.
- Ask only when and if necessary!
- Participate in this research.





Thank you for listening!

Get in touch

Twitter- @_CPBrooks
@Unlockcharity

Email- lqxcb7@nottingham.ac.uk