

Student Views:

SASO Conference, November 2011

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In November 2011, a group of postgraduate students from the MRes Criminology, the MSC Criminology and Criminal Justice, and the MSc Transnational Crime, Justice and Security programmes at the University of Glasgow had the opportunity to attend the annual Scottish Association for the Study of Offending (SASO) Conference held in Dunblane, Scotland.

This is what they made of it

Feeling somewhat apprehensive and out of place at first, this feeling was quickly lulled by the amazing opportunity to engage in conversation with the welcoming academics and professionals in the world of criminal justice, policy and practice working in and beyond Scotland.

The topic of the 2011 conference was the impact of Europe on Criminal Justice in Scotland. With the Hon Lord Brodie QC as the conference chair, and a keynote speech delivered by the Deputy President of the Supreme Court, the Rt Hon Lord Hope of

Craighead, and a full programme featuring world-renowned academics and prominent members of the legal profession, some of us found ourselves in awe at the eloquence and skill with which the conference was conducted. The wide range of backgrounds from which the speakers originated, and their differing perspectives provided an excellent platform for discussion on a range of controversial criminal justice matters. After listening to the brief, but information-packed presentations, we had the opportunity to network and interact in a group or one-to-one basis with some of the professionals in a

relaxed and informal setting. No other learning opportunity could be more valuable for students starting in this industry.

Over two days, the discussion topics ranged from human rights issues, the role of the supreme court, welfarism and the children's hearing system, and the legitimacy of non-custodial sanctions. Most beneficial was the final panel discussion on the implications of ECHR and the UK Supreme Court on criminal justice agencies in Scotland, where the audience were given the opportunity to raise questions or publicly voice their ideas regarding the topics addressed over the course of the conference with the panellists, which included the Director of Scottish Prisons, an area Procurator Fiscal, a police Chief Superintendent, and our very own Professor Fergus McNeil.

Lord Hope's comments at the conference made front page headlines in the Sunday Herald. The issues discussed at the conference, especially

those raised by the Cadder judgement, have proved very far-reaching across criminal justice in Scotland, and to have the opportunity to hear first-hand the views and opinions from so many different criminal justice professionals was hugely interesting and beneficial to us, not least because it linked closely with topics we have been studying. Because we hail from a range of disciplinary backgrounds (law, sociology, social work, psychology) we all took different things from the conference – and the law graduates were especially excited to hear prominent speakers from legal world. For those of us who are not Scottish, it was a great way to learn more about the workings of criminal justice in this country.

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During the tea and lunch breaks, we had the opportunity to meet with other postgraduate students, professionals,

and academics, but there were also a number of criminal justice third sector and security organisations represented at the conference, providing us with opportunities to find out more information about the role of such organisations, which we also found useful for thinking about possible dissertation topics.

A key goal of the conference was to bring together different agencies involved in the prevention and study of crime in Scotland, and we feel that this was certainly achieved, and some

common ground was established.

As a forum for conversation and debate, the SASO conference certainly delivered interesting topics and ideas and provoked lively discussion. We came away with a renewed sense of the importance that professionals across criminal justice understand each other's perspectives, and share a level of understanding. Without this, we will be unable to explore creative solutions to common criminal justice challenges and problems that are in need of solving.