



D55 The Case for a Professional Doctorate in Forensic Science

Michael D. Cole, PhD, Anglia Ruskin University, East Road, Cambridge, CB6 2UD, UNITED KINGDOM*

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the process of obtaining a Professional Doctorate (Prof. Doc.) in Forensic Science. They will understand the similarities and differences between the Prof. Doc. route and traditional doctoral studies. The value of the Prof. Doc. to forensic science employers will be understood. The commitment required from candidates and employers will be detailed.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by allowing candidates and forensic science employers to make informed decisions about the route to take for staff development at the doctoral level.

Over the last decade, forensic science has seen an unprecedented growth in the number of undergraduate programs in the United Kingdom. This growth has been mirrored, in part, by similar growth in Europe and other parts of the world. Destinations for graduates from such programs for further education and development in the subject area include traditional MSc, MPhil, and PhD programs. These can be studied as full-time degrees, part-time degrees, or as distance learning programs. Additionally, there is the opportunity to achieve PhD by publication although within the context of forensic science such doctoral candidates are rare.

Within the United Kingdom the validity of the traditional PhD as a degree training program for anything other than an academic career has come under scrutiny. There is now a movement towards doctoral programs which have a wider applicability, where doctoral candidates engage to a greater extent with their communities, the end users of the outcomes of their programs, and have developed a wider skills base including the transferable skills than has previously been the case.

One doctoral degree pathway which may be considered better suited to the needs of industry, commerce, and in our case the forensic science community is the professional doctorate. The award achieved is of exactly the same academic rigor and standard as a traditional PhD, but the award is achieved by the candidate via a different route.

The professional doctorate is undertaken by experienced colleagues who have a number of years in experience and who have, traditionally, honors level or masters level qualifications but little or no research experience. It has the advantage that it does not take them away from the organization in which they are working in the same way that a lab based doctoral program might. It has the advantage that it can be offered equally in management and administrative functions as well as laboratory based functions that are found in forensic science labs. The starting point is that an identifiable problem/challenge needs to be found in the workplace. This means that at the end of the study period – typically three to six years – a solution has been found to the problem that can be applied in the workplace with beneficial impact demonstrable from the outset.

Professional doctorate candidates achieve their award in two stages. Stage one involves the production of three- seven thousand word documents in which the candidate develops research skills at the doctoral level. In the first of these papers, there is reflection on the practice in the workplace as it currently stands. In paper two, the candidate reflects on the material already published in the area around practice. In paper three the research design aimed at addressing the challenge identified in the workplace, is described. The three papers themselves form a substantive body of work of 21,000 words. In stage two of the program, the candidate undertakes the research itself which addresses the issues identified. The candidate produces a thesis and in time undertakes a viva voce examination in the same way that a traditional PhD is examined. Identical outcomes can be achieved.

This presentation makes the case for development of the Professional Doctorate in Forensic Science given the very great number of forensic science systems that are encountered and the large number of challenges that this can present. The similarities, differences, advantages and disadvantages between this and traditional programs are highlighted. At the end of the presentation attendees will be better placed to determine whether they would best undertake doctoral level study in forensic science via a traditional route or via a professional doctorate.

Doctoral Study, CPD, Professional Practice