

Keith Soothill, Professor of Social Research 1941- 2014

Keith Soothill was an accomplished social researcher and criminologist whose work expressed his commitment to social justice. The son of a railway worker, his PhD at the London School of Economics (supervised by Terry Morris) evaluated APEX, an employment scheme for ex-prisoners (published as *The Prisoner's Release*) and this work started a lifelong concern for the rehabilitation of offenders. He was intensely critical of the political view that ex-offenders should be controlled for life without judicial review. The balance between public protection and the rights of the offender, he maintained, had swung in his lifetime away from offender redemption and towards badly thought-out legislative control.



Keith started his academic career by joining the Sociology department at Lancaster University, moving to the Department of Applied Social Science in 1990, and becoming Professor of Social Research, where he stayed until his retirement. His capacity to forge strong research partnerships and his professorial title reflected his broad interests in social policy, with contributions in social care, medical sociology and the sociology of sport. In the mid-1990s, he decided to again devote his research efforts to criminology and worked intensively on a series of studies which were ground breaking and used both quantitative and qualitative approaches - a study of 7,000 sex offenders exploring the issue of specialisation, a study of sex crime in the media, an investigation into homicide reporting in the press, investigations into marginal crimes - arson, kidnapping and blackmail - and work on escalation and patterning of offender conviction histories.

After retirement, he returned to the issue of rehabilitation, challenging the Home Office on the retention of criminal records of ex-offenders by the police, and the retention of DNA samples for arrestees. His approach to academia was always to question assumptions - he maintained that academic conferences should challenge work robustly and did so at meetings he attended.

Always productive, he was just starting a handbook on sex offending at the time of his death, at the age of 72. He leaves his wife, Jenny, his daughter and son, Debbie and Anthony and three grandchildren.

Brian Francis
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