

Forensic psychologist

Forensic psychologists apply psychological theory to criminal investigation to help understand psychological problems associated with criminal behaviour, and the treatment of those who have committed offences.

They work with all aspects of the criminal justice system.



Working life

Forensic psychologists work with the psychological aspects of investigation, legal process and offending behaviour and apply psychological methods to reduce the impact of this and future re-offending.

You'll work in the treatment of offenders in a range of areas including sexual offending, violence and aggression, interpersonal and social skills and intervention to help stop illicit drug and or alcohol use. You'll offer treatment for those who have committed offences to reduce the impact of their experiences and to reduce chances of reoffending.

Forensic psychologists work with all aspects of the criminal justice system.

Most of your work will be done in association with the police, probation services, prisons, young offender institutions, or secure mental health hospitals.

Your work may include:

- implementing treatment programmes
- reducing stress for staff and offenders in secure settings
- providing research evidence to support psychological practice with offenders
- undertaking statistical analysis for prisoner profiling
- giving expert evidence in court
- advising parole boards and mental health tribunals
- crime analysis

Who will I work with?

Forensic psychologists work with a range of people, including:

- those who have chronic difficulties
- those at risk of offending as a consequence of their behaviour
- family members
- victims
- the public affected by crime

Whilst this usually applies to adults, some specialised forensic psychologists work with young offenders and within the youth justice system.

Where will I work?

The largest single employer of forensic psychologists in the UK is HM Prison Service, although forensic psychologists are also employed by:

- specialist NHS mental health settings (such as 'secure hospitals')
- social services
- offender management services (such as police and probation)
- academic departments, teaching, supervising, and researching in their area of expertise

Entry requirements

Forensic psychologists will usually have completed an accredited undergraduate degree in psychology. From there, they need to complete a Master's degree in forensic psychology approved by the Health and Care Professions Council ^[1] ([HCPC](#) ^[2]). Finally, forensic psychologists complete one of the following:

1. A minimum of three years of evidence supervised practice where the trainee can provide

evidence of applying psychology appropriately in forensic practice

2. An [HCPC](#) ^[2]-accredited doctoral programme that includes practice placements and a third year research thesis

Experience is essential when applying to forensic psychology programmes. This can be paid or voluntary and preference is given to those with experience of working in a forensic setting such as within prisons, probation services or a youth offending service.

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Pay and conditions

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Most jobs in the NHS are covered by the Agenda for Change (AfC) pay scales ^[3]. This pay system covers all staff except doctors, dentists and the most senior managers.

After completing their training, forensic psychologists will be paid at band 7. Psychologists in the NHS can work full or part time. Terms and conditions can vary for employers outside the NHS.

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Where the role can lead

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Once you have qualified as a psychologist, there are a wide range of opportunities. You could apply for more senior positions, for example consultant psychologist or head of a psychology service. As psychology relies heavily on research, you could contribute to the development of the profession through research work and teaching. You could apply for a trainee high intensity therapist position ^[4], enabling you to work under the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies initiative ([IAPT](#) ^[5]).

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Job market and vacancies

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In February 2021, there were 25,812 practitioner psychologists registered with the Health and Care Professions Council [6].

There are over 2,000 forensic psychologists in the UK.

Most NHS organisations advertise their job and apprenticeship vacancies on NHS Jobs [7], including those who run NHS services. Some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations at NHS Choices [8].

If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the values of the [NHS Constitution](#) [9] apply in your everyday work. The same will be true if you are applying for a university course funded by the NHS.

Find out more about NHS values. [10]

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**Further
information**

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- British Psychological Society [11]
- Health and Care Professions Council [12] [13]

Other roles that may interest you

- Clinical psychologist [14]
- High intensity therapist [15]
- Forensic psychiatry [16]
- Psychological wellbeing practitioner [17]

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/forensic-psychologist>

Links

[1] <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/>

[2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#HCPC>

[3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates>

[4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/high-intensity-therapist>

[5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#IAPT>

[6] <http://www.hcpc-uk.org>

[7] <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>

[8] <http://www.nhs.uk/service-search>

- [9] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#NHS_Constitution
- [10] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/working-health/nhs-constitution>
- [11] <http://www.bps.org.uk/careers-in-psychology>
- [12] <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/>
- [13] <http://www.hpc-uk.org/>
- [14] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/clinical-psychologist>
- [15] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/high-intensity-therapist>
- [16] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/psychiatry/forensic-psychiatry>
- [17] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/psychological-wellbeing-practitioner>