

MSc Forensic Psychology, University of Portsmouth: Guidelines for Prospective Applicants (in response to frequently asked questions)

Graduate Basis for Chartered membership (GBC) of the British Psychological Society (BPS)

Having GBC (formerly known as Graduate Basis for Registration or GBR) is the minimum requirement for entry to the MSc Forensic Psychology programme. To benefit from, and keep up, with the teaching it is essential that students have a sufficient grounding in psychology. GBC gives recognition of this. In addition, you would never become chartered or registered as a Forensic Psychologist without GBC.

GBC rests upon having completed a degree -whether honours/joint honours or conversion programme - in psychology that is accredited by the BPS. With your application please either upload a copy of the BPS webpage confirming your degree confers GBC, or a letter from the BPS confirming your GBC.

If you did your degree outside of the UK, you may still be granted GBC if your degree is judged by the BPS to have involved (and assessed) sufficient coverage of core areas such as cognitive, social, and developmental psychology, individual differences and research skills. If you have already completed your degree you are advised to contact the BPS (mail@bps.org.uk) without delay; you will have to provide transcripts and getting a decision usually takes several weeks. If successful, please send your letter of confirmation with your application. If you are still completing your degree, don't delay your application; do however contact the BPS as soon as you have your final degree classification and transcript and then send us a copy of the letter informing you of their decision as soon as possible.

If you are not eligible for GBC, perhaps because your degree was in a subject other than psychology (such as criminology or law), you might consider doing a conversion programme that leads to GBC. These are usually one year if full- time and two years if part- time. The BPS can give a full list of places and titles of programmes. Note that the University of Portsmouth runs an accredited conversion degree programme (MSc Psychology [Conversion]).

Relevant experience

GBC aside, application to the MSc Forensic Psychology is best seen as a competitive process. There are always considerably more applicants than places. We usually take about two dozen new people a year, some of which will be part- timers (and in any given year we will of course have the part- timers who started the previous year as well). For the new places we can have up to 100 applicants, so it pays to strengthen your position as much as possible. How well you do in your initial degree counts. So too does taking any opportunities to do modules or a research project relevant to forensic psychology. However we recognise that sometimes a degree result can be affected by extraneous factors and that not all courses provide the opportunity to study directly relevant aspects. In such

circumstances it is especially important that you demonstrate your commitment to, and awareness of, what the field involves. The best way to do this is through relevant experience. This is important anyway, even if you are strong academically.

Relevant experience can be of three kinds. First is paid employment directly within or related to the criminal justice system. This includes, for example, having been a psychological assistant in HM Prison and Probation Service, an assistant psychologist in a forensic mental health setting, a probation support officer, or having worked as a police officer, or in a Youth Offending Team or similar. Second is paid work in a setting where you have to use “transferable skills” (such as interpersonal skills and problem- solving) with often challenging populations such as rough sleepers, individuals with learning disabilities, those with mental health or substance- related problems, or ex- offenders. Such roles often have “care worker” or “support worker” in the job title. We have on occasion taken applicants with experience in dealing with aggressive, dishonest or inebriated clients in other contexts. Third is voluntary work with agencies such as Victim Support (they give training in counselling skills), NACRO (they have initiatives such as teaching prisoners to read), SOVA or Motiv8 (e.g., mentoring young offenders or those at risk) or ‘appropriate adult’ services (ensuring that the rights of young people brought into police stations are upheld). Such work also helps job prospects after the degree programme.

Application

Being selected depends largely on the quality of your academic attainment, relevant experience and references -- but it is also worth taking care with the documentation. Quality of writing does matter. So too does the ability to reflect on your experience and knowledge and to reflect upon what a career in forensic psychology would involve – and where appropriate to connect the two in, for example, demonstrating your understanding of how skills that you’ve begun to develop might be relevant to working as a scientist-practitioner. Your reflections on what a career in this field involves will be enhanced by reading around this (a starting point could be relevant websites such as those of the BPS and HM Prison and Probation Service). So, in your personal statement it’s helpful for you to make explicit aspects such as why you want to do the programme, your understanding of forensic psychology, previous academic and practical experience, particular interests, aspirations and your ideas for your research project, all written to an appropriate academic and professional standard.

Good luck!

Dr Dominic Pearson

Programme Lead