Development dialogue master's programme Forensic Psychology, Maastricht University

22 May 2025

As part of the reaccreditation visit for the Forensic Psychology programme at Maastricht University, a development session was organised to stimulate reflection and dialogue on the programme's future. The session aimed to explore opportunities and challenges, with a forward-looking focus on how to enhance the programme's relevance and resilience by 2030. Centred around the theme 'Future-Proofing Forensic Psychology: Our 2030 Programme Vision', the discussion addressed two core areas: the evolution of programme content in response to societal developments and scientific progress, and the transformation of assessment practices in light of increasing AI integration.

Participants included the visiting panel, students, academic staff, programme and faculty management, forensic professionals, and other relevant stakeholders. The session was facilitated by an independent moderator who has expertise in both the field and higher education. The session employed a Future Backcasting approach, whereby participants – divided into three mixed groups – envisioned the ideal state of the programme in 2030 and then mapped out the steps required to realise this vision. The session concluded with a synthesis of key themes and divergent perspectives, drawn together with the help of the moderator.

Theme 1: curriculum developement

During the first session of the development exercise, participants explored how the Forensic Psychology programme could evolve to remain relevant and impactful by 2030. A key outcome was the call for greater inclusion of victimology throughout the curriculum. While some victim-related topics are already present, there was strong support for either embedding the victim perspective across existing courses or introducing a new core course, possibly with a focus on restorative justice.

Participants also emphasised the importance of addressing female offenders and age diversity more thoroughly. While young offenders are already represented in the curriculum, elderly offenders – who continue to commit crimes and have unique forensic needs – remain underrepresented. Their inclusion could be integrated, for instance, into the Forensic Neuropsychology course.

Culture was another recurrent theme, with a preference for embedding culturally sensitive perspectives throughout the curriculum rather than creating stand-alone courses. Participants suggested assessing whether existing courses reflect this adequately or whether additional lectures may be required.

Emerging technology and AI were identified as both a challenge and opportunity. Integrating AI into areas such as offender assessment, treatment, and student training was considered essential. The curriculum should also address cybercrime and treatment of online offenders. Other suggestions included expanding the scope of research topics and covering group dynamics, transdiagnostic processes, and the distinction between in-patient and out-patient care.

Finally, the session highlighted the importance of supporting student resilience through peer intervision, reflective practices, and psychologically safe learning environments.

Theme 2: assessment and AI

The second session focused on the future of student assessment, particularly in the context of increasing use of AI in education. Participants agreed on the need to reduce student stress by providing clearer assessment guidelines across all courses. While some courses already use rubrics, it was suggested that these be standardised, made more specific, and supplemented with examples. Additionally, improving transparency around deadlines and publishing schedules earlier would allow students to plan more effectively and manage their workload.

There was broad support for shifting towards formative assessment, as students have already undergone a rigorous selection process. Rather than relying heavily on exams – which are seen as both stressful and less constructive – there should be more emphasis on process-oriented assessments, particularly for written assignments. These should be supported with more in-class guidance, treating writing as a developmental skill.

The integration of generative AI emerged as a key theme. Participants advocated for clear rules on AI usage, and training to ensure students learn how to use AI tools critically, including evaluating AI-generated outputs. The same applies to staff, with the recommendation to involve AI experts in training both students and educators.

Innovative AI applications were also discussed, such as using AI-driven avatars or VR to help students develop social and communication skills – potentially offering a more realistic and effective alternative to practising with peers.

In sum, the session called for a more supportive, process-focused, and technologically integrated approach to assessment that reflects both the realities of the field and student well-being.