

Unit 35: Applications of Forensic Psychology

Unit code: A/502/5580

QCF Level 3: BTEC National

Credit value: 10

Guided learning hours: 60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to explore the way in which psychology is used in a vocational setting and how it can inform decision-making in the Criminal Justice System (CJS).

● Unit introduction

This unit explores how forensic psychologists work in practice by assisting the court to determine whether a defendant is mentally fit to understand the court process or was suffering from a mental illness at the time of the crime. Their job may also entail deciding and implementing the most appropriate treatment for an offender. Forensic psychologists can also analyse serious crimes and develop criminal profiles of suspects using various methods and drawing on relevant psychological theories.

In this unit learners will examine the role of the forensic psychologist as an expert witness, a criminal profiler, a prison psychologist and a researcher. Learners will understand that this involves the use of therapies in forensic practice. Learners will study the history and development of psychological profiling and use the techniques to analyse crime and produce a profile. This will enable them to explore the way research has influenced the development of theories that underpin these approaches.

This unit examines how psychological research has influenced our understanding of criminal behaviour. Much of this unit will be delivered and assessed through literature searches and research.

The knowledge and skills gained during this unit enhance understanding of psychological principles, theories and research and how they have influenced the Criminal Justice System. This unit places an emphasis on forensic psychology in a vocational setting and gives learners the opportunity to explain practical problems in an ever-developing Criminal Justice System.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Understand the applied nature of forensic psychology
- 2 Know how psychology is used in forensic practice
- 3 Be able to apply psychological profiling theory and techniques to produce a criminal profile
- 4 Understand the contribution psychological research has made to understanding criminal behaviour.

Unit content

1 Understand the applied nature of forensic psychology

Definition: comparison with other areas; criminal psychology; police psychology; criminology; clinical; occupational and educational psychology

Role of forensic psychologist: expert witness; prison psychologist; criminal profiler; researcher

2 Know how psychology is used in forensic practice

Types of treatment: behaviour therapy; cognitive behavioural therapy; social skills training; anger management programmes

Risk assessment: approaches to risk assessment; development and evaluation of assessment instruments

3 Be able to apply psychological profiling theory and techniques to produce a criminal profile

Development of profiling: FBI approach; geographic profiling; behavioural evidence analysis (BEA)

Theories: theory of homicide; theory of rape; typologies; circle theory

Application: analysis of hypothetical crime(s) to produce a profile report

4 Understand the contribution psychological research has made to understanding criminal behaviour

Themes: quantitative and qualitative approaches; case studies; interviews; surveys

Structure of academic papers: abstract; introduction; method; results; discussion; references

Evaluation: methods used; interpreting results; understanding discussion and conclusions

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 examine how definitions of forensic psychology are applied in a vocational setting [IE2]	M1 explain the contribution of forensic psychology to one aspect of the legal process	D1 evaluate the contribution of forensic psychology to one aspect of the legal process
P2 describe how psychology is used in offender treatment programmes [IE3; CT4]	M2 explain the risk of potential consequences in criminal treatment programmes	D2 evaluate the effectiveness of criminal treatment programmes
P3 produce an outline criminal profile using psychological profiling theory and techniques [IE3,4,5,6; CT1,4,5,6]	M3 produce a detailed criminal profile using psychological profiling theories and techniques	D3 discuss the usefulness of psychological profiling techniques in the investigation of crime
P4 examine how psychological research has helped in the understanding of criminal behaviour. [IE2; RL2,3,4; SM2,3]	M4 demonstrate independent use of sources to illustrate how psychological research has helped in the understanding of criminal behaviour.	D4 evaluate the psychological research that has helped in the understanding of criminal behaviour.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers CT – creative thinkers	RL – reflective learners TW – team workers	SM – self-managers EP – effective participators
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Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

This unit builds on *Unit 34: Criminal Psychology*, but it is not essential for learners to have completed this as a pre-requisite. Learners consider definitions of forensic psychology and criminal psychology, and consider the similarities and differences. Learners will see that where criminal psychology looks at the behaviour of those involved in the CJS, forensic psychology is used to inform courts' and other tribunals' decision-making.

Learners will need to extend their knowledge of research methods and how to read academic journal articles critically. Learners could select a journal article about psychological profiling, and give a presentation to other learners on how the research was carried out, evaluating its findings.

This unit explores the relatively new area of psychological profiling through its modest history, considering the different approaches. The tension between the FBI/clinical approaches and the more 'scientific' approaches is examined, as well as the development of geographic profiling.

Learners may hold a debate on whether criminal profiling will ever replace traditional investigative approaches, requiring two teams to research and present their arguments for and against the motion. Case studies of serial murderers and rapists, including documentary material, will assist in presenting this topic.

Having considered the theoretical approaches to criminal profiling, learners should use these in practical case studies, analysing data and producing a profile. This aspect may be linked to *Unit 40: Criminal Investigations in Practice* and the investigation of serious crimes.

Learners need to examine the role of forensic psychologists, including their appearance in court as expert witnesses. A key aspect of forensic psychological practice includes the treatment of prisoners and mentally disordered persons. Learners may benefit from a talk by a prison psychologist to support this work. Case studies and press reports may be examined, as well as research exploring the process of risk assessment of offenders.

A key concern in society is the safety of the public from dangerous offenders, and assessing and managing the risk this group may present is a key role for forensic practitioners. This may be an aspect that learners can explore.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Introduction to unit and assignment programme.
Outline the roles in forensic psychology.
Assignment 1 – Forensic Psychology in Practice [P1, M1, D1] <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compare forensic psychology to criminal psychology in order to make a distinction between psychologists who explain criminal behaviour and those who apply knowledge to practical scenarios.• Web research or paper-based research into definitions of forensic psychology. Learners discover that it can be defined in many ways.• Comparison to other vocational areas in psychology – group presentation work.• Learners need to be aware of different job roles within forensic psychology. Learners independently research different vocations and produce storyboards of 'day in the life of'.• Assignment workshops and independent research in class.• Home study including assignment work and various assigned tasks.
Describe how psychology is used in criminal treatment programmes.
Assignment 2 – Can Criminals Be Treated? [P2, M2, D2] <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cognitive behavioural therapy techniques: Summary of the cognitive approach which must include input-process-output and the mind as a computer.• Anger management and traditional cognitive behavioural programmes – learners complete role plays of given therapy situations in prison. Plus follow up work.• Social skills training – poster work on designing an appropriate training programme for a young offender.• Behavioural therapy – token economy in prisons: Summary of operant conditioning needed in order to understand basis for techniques (reinforcers and learning through consequences) leading to application in therapy. Case study work to assess the costs and benefits for using a token economy in prison.• Risk assessment in psychology – presentation addressing the concept of 'risk' and how it is used in psychology (risk of self harm and recidivism). Designing a risk assessment tool and applying the process to a case study.• Assignment workshops and independent research in class.• Home study including assignment work and various assigned tasks.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Produce an outline criminal profile using psychological profiling theory and techniques.

Assignment 3 – Offender Profiling [P3, M3, D3]

- Introduction to offender profiling – using famous cases, eg Jack the Ripper, Mad Bomber of New York.
- British approach to profiling (Behavioural Evidence Analysis) leading into recent work of David Canter and geographic profiling. Video clips from Canter's Mapping Murder series using historical cases. Suffolk murders as an example of circle theory.
- FBI approach – use of 'criminal minds' to demonstrate a typology approach to profiling. Textbook work to back this up with notes.
- Comparison of different methods of profiling and their use of theories to back up profiles.
- Crime scene aftermath. Learners profile a crime using approaches and theories taught in lessons. Guidance needed in completing this.
- Assignment workshops and independent research in class.
- Home study including assignment work and various assigned tasks.

Examine how psychological research has helped in the understanding of criminal behaviour.

Assignment 4 – Explaining Criminal Behaviour [P4, M4, D4]

- Summary of research methods used in psychology, including differences between experiments, case studies, surveys etc. Learners could use 'classic studies' to understand difference, eg Bandura as an observation, Loftus and Palmer as an experiment.
- Introduction to the outcome by using an example of an academic paper to 'dissect' in class with learners.
- Learners choose their own example of a topic area and produce a comprehensive research project into the chosen area and how psychological research has influenced the understanding of the chosen criminal behaviour. Including work in class and out of class.

Review of unit and assignment programme.

Assessment

All the pass grade criteria must be met in order for a learner to achieve this unit.

For P1, learners must define forensic psychology and how it fits into the legal process. Learners researching the definition will find that it varies according to different commentators and practitioners. They will therefore need to give reasons for their choice of definition. Learners must include examples of some of the different ways in which forensic psychologists work in order to understand the applied nature of forensic psychology. This may involve choosing a specific role within forensic psychology, eg expert witness, therapist, academic researcher, and profiler) and considering their day-to-day tasks in the form of a story board.

For M1, learners must select a particular area of forensic psychology practice and explain its contribution to the legal process. Learners may choose to consider the criminal profiler and examine their contribution to the investigation process, or the forensic psychiatrist's contribution to the treatment of offenders. Forensic psychology entails work for the legal system and therefore psychologists from other applied areas may find themselves carrying out work for the courts. Learners could explore the contribution that occupational, educational or developmental psychologists make.

For D1, learners must consider and draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the contributions psychology can make to legal decision-making. Learners need to research and provide evidence to support their conclusions. For example, they could examine police perceptions of forensic psychologists or the effect of forensic psychologists as expert witnesses by using case study examples.

For P2, learners must describe how psychology is used in criminal treatment programmes. Learners should describe at least two types of treatment and how they use psychology. For M2, learners must consider the risks involved in carrying out forensic psychology work and produce a risk assessment based on a case study. Learners should be aware that risk assessment in psychology can take place in different contexts, eg risk of recidivism on release, risk of self harm whilst in custody). For D2, learners must evaluate the effectiveness of the therapies outlined in P2; learners should provide evidence of the effect of therapy programmes on rates of recidivism, and this could be considered across cultures. Learners should also incorporate some discussion of how accurate risk assessments are after therapy and before release.

For P3, learners must produce an outline psychological profile using profiling theories and techniques. Learners could achieve this by either attending a 'real time' crime scene which may be set up as part of *Unit 32: Forensic Evidence Collection and Analysis*, or by profiling a given case study. For M3, learners should expand on the profile given in P3 and include more detail in terms of the conclusions drawn regarding the crime scene and the psychological theory used to produce the profile. Within the profile learners must analyse the conclusions drawn from the crime scene by using research to draw more detailed conclusions. For D3, learners must consider the strengths and limitations of the profiling techniques used and how useful they are in supporting investigations.

For P4, learners must examine how psychological research has developed our understanding of criminal behaviour. Learners may choose to examine psychological explanations of serial murderers, rapists or arsonists. Alternatively, they may choose to consider explanations for such things as youth offending or stalking behaviour. This learning outcome could be completed as an individual research project where learners can select their own topic.

For M4, learners must use a wide range of sources in order to demonstrate that psychology has helped with a particular topic. The aim of this criterion is to encourage depth and variety in independent research. In terms of using a 'wide range' of sources, this may be subjective and specific to the chosen topic. If a pass level learner uses five sources, then a merit learner should use at least eight. For example, learners may demonstrate how some approaches have used interviews with offenders, while others have analysed archival data. For D4, learners must consider the strengths and limitations of the psychological research used in P4 and M4. Learners must consider the methodology and analysis used in the research, eg many research studies involve a correlational technique and learners should be aware of the dangers in drawing conclusions from this).

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1	Forensic Psychology in Practice	The local authority is trying to recruit forensic psychologists. You are a marketing manager and must produce some promotional material explaining what is involved in the field and how it is different from other areas of psychology.	A leaflet to outline what is involved in forensic psychology. A report assessing the contribution forensic psychology has made to the legal system.
P2, M2, D2	Can Criminals Be Treated?	You are a forensic psychologist and have been asked to write treatment programmes for two types of offenders (a young offender committing petty crimes and an older violent offender) including a risk assessment of their likelihood to reoffend after treatment.	Writing treatment programmes outlining type of treatment and what it will involve. Risk assessment of each case. Report outlining evaluation of effectiveness of treatment.
P3, M3, D3	Offender Profiling	A crime has been committed and as a profiler you have been asked to profile the crime scene in order to aid the police investigation.	A criminal profile using one or more profiling techniques and psychological theories. This could be in the form of a presentation as if presenting to the police. Report outlining the usefulness of profiling.
P4, M4, D4	Explaining Criminal Behaviour	You are an expert witness and have been asked to prepare for a court case: you must research the behaviour in question in detail in order to ensure you are fully briefed about the particular behaviour.	An individual research project, which is designed to aid independent learning and the transition to Level 4 study. An Individual Learning Plan approach could be adopted to ensure organisation.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Applied Science sector suite. This unit has particular links with the units shown below in the BTEC Applied science suite of qualifications:

Level 2	Level 3
Investigating Human Behaviour	Criminology
	Forensic Evidence Collection and Analysis
	Criminal Psychology
	Criminal Investigation Procedures
	Criminal Investigation Practices
	Clinical Psychology

Essential resources

Learners need to research information when investigating areas of, and roles within, the Criminal Justice System and forensic psychology. They need access to academic journals, books and websites. Access to organisations and practitioners, by way of visits and/or guest speakers, and case studies will support and enhance delivery and assessment of this unit. Psychology practicals used in other courses and available online might be adapted to examine criminal issues. TV series such as 'Criminal Minds' can help when discussing contemporary issues such as the use of profiling, and to assess learning outcome 3 learners will benefit from attending a set up 'real time' crime scene. This will involve links with *Unit 32: Forensic Evidence Collection and Analysis*.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

Visiting speakers may come from academic institutions in order to gain an insight into the role of research in the development of the field. Visits to local courts or police stations can give learners an idea of the role a psychologist might play in the Criminal Justice System.

Professional body – British Psychological Society – www.bps.org.uk

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Ainsworth P – *Offender Profiling and Crime Analysis* (Willan Publishing, 2001) ISBN 9781903240212

Alison L – *The Forensic Psychologist's Casebook: Psychological Profiling and Criminal Investigation* (Willan Publishing, 2005) ISBN 9781843921011

Bartol C R – *Criminal Behavior: A Psychosocial Approach* (Prentice Hall, 2004) ISBN 9780131850491

Blackburn R – *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct: Theory, Research and Practice* (John Wiley & Sons, 1995) ISBN 9780471961758

Canter D – *Criminal Shadows* (Authorlink, 2001) ISBN 9781928704218

Canter D – *Mapping Murder (Walking in Killers' Footsteps)* (Virgin Books, 2005) ISBN 9780753510964

Canter D and Alison L – *Profiling Rape and Murder* (Ashgate, 2009) ISBN 9781840144956

Howitt D – *Introduction to Forensic and Criminal Psychology* (Prentice Hall, 2008) ISBN 9781405874465

Stephenson G M – *The Psychology of Criminal Justice* (Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 1992) ISBN 9780631145479

Towl G J and Crighton D A – *The Handbook of Psychology for Forensic Practitioners* (Routledge, 1996) ISBN 9780415128889

Turvey B E – *Criminal Profiling: An Introduction to Behavioral Evidence Analysis* (Academic Press, 2008) ISBN 9780123741004

Journals

Journal of Behavioural Profiling

Journal of Investigative Psychology

Law and Human Behavior

Legal and Criminological Psychology

Websites

www.crimeandclues.com

Crime and Clues

www.homeoffice.gov.uk

The Home Office

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research

The Home Office research and statistics site

www.profiling.org/journal

Journal of Behavioural Profiling

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	[IE2] researching definitions of forensic psychology and how psychological research has helped to understand criminal behaviour [IE3] considering different approaches to treatment [IE4,5, 6] producing a criminal profile using different techniques
Creative thinkers	[CT4] questioning the assumptions of treatment programmes [CT1,4,5,6] making assumptions and deductions from a crime scene in order to produce a profile; using different techniques to produce a profile
Reflective learners	[RL2,3,4] setting goals; reviewing their progress weekly; dealing with continual feedback
Self-managers	[SM2,3] setting weekly targets; organising time.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	[IE4] evaluating the effectiveness of treatment
Creative thinkers	[CT3] applying treatment strategies to case studies, using inventive suggestions [CT4] debating various issues such as how offender profiling should be used or the use of different profiling strategies
Team workers	[TW1,2] producing a storyboard of a 'day in the life of' in small groups and taking different roles within the groups [TW4] showing consideration to fellow learners when debating issues
Effective participants	[EP2,5,6] presenting persuasive cases for action, influencing others, and balancing diverse views when debating issues.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Use ICT systems	
Select, interact with and use ICT systems independently for a complex task to meet a variety of needs	producing a leaflet using a publisher package in order to outline the field of forensic psychology
Use ICT to effectively plan work and evaluate the effectiveness of the ICT system they have used	using an individual learning plan to produce work in learning outcome 4; this may be electronic
ICT – Find and select information	
Select and use a variety of sources of information independently for a complex task	using the internet to research:
Access, search for, select and use ICT-based information and evaluate its fitness for purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forensic psychology definitions • forensic psychology job roles • psychological theory to evidence criminal profile • individual project (internet journals and search engines)
ICT – Develop, present and communicate information	
Enter, develop and format information independently to suit its meaning and purpose including:	<p>using tables to summarise psychological research</p> <p>using graphs to display changes in recidivism rates in psychological research</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • text and tables • images • numbers • records 	using images to break up information in leaflets
Present information in ways that are fit for purpose and audience	constructing a leaflet to outline forensic psychology
Select and use ICT to communicate and exchange information safely, responsibly and effectively including storage of messages and contact lists	communicating with other members of the group via ICT methods, eg email and VLE community
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	<p>discussing issues in class such as the use of treatment with offenders, the success of criminal profiling</p> <p>presenting criminal profile to the class as part of p4/m4</p>
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	comparing forensic psychology to other vocational fields
	using texts as part of learning outcome 4 individual project and gathering information to provide evidence for the criminal profile
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	writing reports summarising strengths and weaknesses of topics such as treatment of offenders, criminal profiling and use of forensic psychology in legal settings.