

REASSESSMENT DISTINCTIVE FEATURE
Small-scale and intensive education – Standard C

Master's programme Forensic Psychology
Maastricht University

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1. Introduction

On July 1 and 2, 2019, an independent expert panel assessed the quality of the masters' programme in Forensic Psychology at Maastricht University (UM). The panel concluded that the programme meets all standards of the NVAO framework for limited programme assessments. With regards to the practice-based assessment of the distinctive feature Small-scale and intensive education, all but one of the standards were met. The panel concluded that the programme did not meet the criteria pertaining to Standard C (programme – learning environment) of the distinctive feature Small-scale and intensive education.

In response to the panel's findings, the programme drafted a development plan that addressed the panel's concerns and the programme's proposal for improvements. This plan was approved by the Faculty Board (August 27, 2019), the Faculty Council (September 12, 2019) and the Educational Programme Committee (September 19, 2019). Based on the panel's findings and the accompanying development plan, the NVAO granted the programme an opportunity to have standard C reassessed.

1.1 Panel

The panel that performed the reassessment of standard C consists of six independent experts, including one student member. The NVAO has approved the composition of the panel on January 5, 2023:

- Prof. dr. Geert Vervaeke (chair), Dean Tilburg Law School (Tilburg University) and professor of Law and Psychology (KU Leuven, Belgium)
- Dr. Sanne Verwaaijen, Independent Forensic Mental Health Professional
- Prof. dr. Chijs van Nieuwenhuizen, Professor of Forensic Mental Health Care (Tilburg University), professor of Transforming Care for Youth (Tilburg University), programme leader of the research group Forensic Mental Health Care (GGzE) and clinician (GGzE, De Catamaran)
- Els Verhoef MCM, Independent adviser and (interim) manager
- Prof. mr. dr. Anne Ruth Mackor, Professor of Professional Ethics, in particular legal professions (University of Groningen)
- Drs. Merlijn van Montfoort (student member), Former master's student Clinical and Forensic Psychology (University of Amsterdam) and Investigative Criminology (Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam)

The panel was supported by drs. Linda te Marvelde, who acted as secretary.

1.2 Assessment framework

The master's programme Forensic Psychology is subject to assessment in accordance with:

- Specification of the criteria pertaining to the distinctive feature of "Small-scale and intensive education (January 2018)";
- Guidelines for practice-based assessment: "distinctive feature small-scale and intensive education" (January 2018).

The online reassessment of criterion C took place on March 3, 2023. The report was finalised on April 18, 2023.

1.3 Working method

Approximately five weeks before the site visit, the panel received the documentation, including a self-evaluation report (see appendix 5.1). These documents formed the basis for the assessment. The panel studied the documents and organised a digital panel meeting two weeks prior to the site visit. In this meeting, the panel discussed its initial findings and prepared the additional questions for the site visit regarding the fulfilment of the criteria of standard C (programme: learning environment).

The online reassessment took place on 3 March 2023 (see appendix 5.2). During the online meetings, the panel spoke with delegations of second-year students, lecturers, members of the Educational Programme Committee and the programme management. At the end of the visit, the panel drew up its findings. The panel's chair presented these orally to members of the programme management, members of the Educational Programme Committee, and lecturers.

After the visit, the secretary drew up the advisory report. After processing the panel's feedback, the secretary sent the advisory report to representatives of the programme for the purpose of fact-checking the text. The secretary has corrected factual inaccuracies identified by representatives of the programme in the final version. The Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience of Maastricht University received the final report on April 19, 2023.

1.4 Judgements and assessment rules practice-based assessment distinctive feature

In accordance with the NVAO's Guidelines for practice-based assessment: "distinctive feature small-scale and intensive education", the panel used the following judgements and assessment rules for the standards and the distinctive feature as a whole.

The panel scores each criterion in terms of "meets the standard" or "does not meet the standard".

In addition, the panel will provide a final conclusion of "positive" or "negative", which is defined as:

Positive: all the criteria are scored as "meets the standard".
Negative: one or more of the criteria are scored as "does not meet the standard".

2. Administrative data programme

Name of the programme:	Forensic Psychology
Croho:	69305
Level and orientation of the programme:	academic research master's programme
Credits:	120 EC
Specialisations or tracks:	n.a.
Location:	Maastricht
Mode of study:	full-time
Language of instruction:	English
Distinctive feature:	Small-scale and intensive education
Submission date report reassessment:	23 June 2023

3. Summary

In its initial assessment (2019) of Standard C (teaching-learning environment) of the distinctive feature of Small-scale and intensive education, the panel found that the master's programme in Forensic Psychology did not yet meet all criteria pertaining to the teaching-learning environment. In order to comply with Standard C, the panel established that the programme should organise a systematic, proactive and unavoidable approach of its supervision practices in the second year (that actively involves Maastricht supervisors) when students are out of direct sight of the programme.

The panel reassessed Standard C in 2023 and found that all three of the panel's requirements concerning the second-year approach are addressed. The approach is now:

- *Unavoidable*, a new course PRO-F: Professional Reflections & Observations – Forensic Psychology, 2EC). PRO-F was implemented, introducing professional reflection meetings with students and a group mentor. This course is mandatory for all students.
- *Proactive*, PRO-F offers meetings which are supervised by an experienced group mentor of Maastricht University.
- *Systematic*, there are now built-in systematic quality controls in the second year.

The panel appreciates that essential changes have been made in the second year without negatively impacting the (need for the) self-organizing capacity of students, which the programme advocates.

The programme has taken several measures since the panel visited in 2019, such as improving the information provided to students and their internship supervisors and organizing a systematic, annual evaluation of the internships. The panel's current positive assessment of Standard C is mainly based on the introduction of the PRO-F course, which has the advantage of building upon a very strong first year of the programme in terms of community building. However, the panel does find that PRO-F is a *minimum minimorum*: the programme should ensure that its efforts do not decrease. The panel urges the programme management to ensure that the lecturers continue to enjoy their support and to provide means/resources for them to make a continued success of PRO-F.

The panel identified two areas for further development. These firstly concern options for improved coordination among lecturers with regard to:

- intervention methods that are chosen and applied in PRO-F meetings;
- consequences of missing a PRO-F meeting (and increasing transparency concerning this issue);
- planning PRO-F meetings (to include taking into consideration the work-life balance of students and the time zones of their abodes).

Secondly, to further strengthen the second year in relation to the teaching-learning environment, the panel finds that the programme should consider making individual mentor meetings compulsory and ideally initiated by the mentors themselves. The panel is convinced that this will have a positive effect on students, because they already indicate that PRO-F gives them a greater drive and more insights and energy, which shows that students highly value contact with Maastricht staff. The panel believes that a proactive approach of the mentors will most definitely be of added value.

The panel assesses the standards of the distinctive feature Small-scale and intensive education as follows:

Standard	Judgement
<i>A: Intended learning outcomes</i>	<i>Meets the standard</i>
<i>B: Programme - contents</i>	<i>Meets the standard</i>
<i>C: Teaching-learning environment</i>	<i>Meets the standard</i>
<i>D: Intake</i>	<i>Meets the standard</i>
<i>E: Staff</i>	<i>Meets the standard</i>
<i>F: Facilities</i>	<i>Meets the standard</i>
<i>G: Achieved learning outcomes</i>	<i>Meets the standard</i>
Final conclusion	Positive

4. Assessment

4.1 Standard C: Curriculum: learning environment

The teaching concept is based on a challenging learning environment, education substantiated in a small-scale and intensive manner, and a learning community of students and staff. The small-scale and intense nature of the education is demonstrated by the level of participation and preparation that is expected from students. The curriculum is structured in such a manner as to ensure nominal study progress by the students, including extracurricular activities.

Findings and considerations

Initial assessment 2019

In 2019, that panel found that the first year of the (two-year) master's programme in Forensic Psychology is intensive in terms of student-staff contact hours, study load, and degree of individual guidance, which is firmly based in its problem-based learning approach. The programme ensures a high level of student-teacher interaction and excellent supervision. The second year is also intensive and small-scale in nature, since students work fulltime in a forensic setting. However, in 2019 the programme delegated supervision and guidance to external supervisors (internship placements) and the students' own initiative. The programme appointed Maastricht supervisors for both the research and clinical internships, but it did not offer structural supervision, intervision, guidance or set extracurricular programme. As a result, the programme did not meet the requirements of standard C in which the programme is expected to offer a challenging learning environment, education substantiated in a small-scale and intensive manner, and a learning community of students and staff. Since supervision was delegated to external partners, the programme could not ensure nominal study progress either.

The panel therefore concluded that the manner in which supervision during the second year was organised should be amended. The panel found that the programme should have to organise a systematic, proactive and unavoidable approach in the second year (that actively involves Maastricht supervisors) when students are out of direct sight of the programme. In other words, the panel advocated a systematic supply-oriented approach, rather than its demand-oriented approach in its second-year supervision practices. Although this recommendation was mainly directed towards the clinical internship, the panel argued that the same was important for the research internship (considering the scientist-practitioner model that the programme advocates). Lastly, the panel also concluded that the Educational Programme Committee did not evaluate the second year or seek feedback from students and operated too much at a distance.

Reassessment 2023

In response to the panel's findings, the programme focussed on taking three measures concerning the curriculum and/or the quality assurance cycle (PDCA-cycle):

1. Introduction of a new course (PRO-F: Professional Reflections & Observations – Forensic Psychology, 2EC). PRO-F was implemented in academic year 2022-2023, introducing professional reflection meetings with students and a group mentor;

2. Make explicit in the information provided to students and their internship supervisors (internship institution and UM) what the programme expects concerning how they work together and what each one's responsibilities are;
3. Organizing a systematic, annual evaluation of the internships, in which a key role is reserved for the Educational Programme Committee.

The panel met with the programme management, current second-year students, lecturers and educational programme committee members to explore what concrete changes are noticeable as a result of the measures taken. The panel spoke at length about the introduction of PRO-F; the reflective scientist-practitioner pathway added to the second internship year. PRO-F does not replace internship supervision by external and/or UM supervisors; rather it increases the intensity and quality of contact with UM lecturers. The goal of PRO-F is to improve self-reflective skills through a number of individual and group meetings and exercises. Students are invited to discuss common issues, dilemma's and to learn from each other.

The panel firstly discussed the logistics of PRO-F meetings, since solid frequency and consistent planning will contribute to maintaining feeling with a group, but also building trust, security and confidence. The programme aims to organize six online meetings of two hours, every eight weeks. The panel was informed that it can be a struggle to plan the PRO-F meetings because students are working in different time zones all over the world. Therefore, the panel argues that the programme could take these time zones into consideration when composing the PRO-F groups. It also encourages the programme to explicitly evaluate whether the frequency of the meetings (every 8 weeks) works well or should be increased. Lastly, despite the fact that attendance is mandatory, the actual repercussions for missing a meeting are as of yet unclear. The panel therefore finds that the programme should increase transparency by explicating its intentions concerning the unavoidability of PRO-F.

Regarding PRO-F methodology, the panel was informed that each meeting is dedicated to a specific theme that the students prepare for. Groups of six students (max.) meet online in the presence of a 'group mentor' to discuss specific tasks and activities that have been performed in the weeks before it. Students and lecturers report that the meetings leave ample space to introduce and discuss personal cases in addition to the themes that are preprogrammed. The panel is aware that PRO-F is relatively new and is still being developed further, and encourages the lecturers to, as a team, discuss and be explicit about the supervision methods that they use and to make sure to explain the methods to students. The panel suggests that exposure to different methods could help students in their future careers in which they will most likely use various supervision methods themselves.

The lecturers have proactively identified some points for improvement and are open to continue the development of PRO-F. The panel urges the programme management to ensure that the lecturers continue to enjoy their support and to provide means/resources for them to make a continued success of PRO-F. Students are enthusiastic about PRO-F and report that this part of the programme provides them with energy and insights. The panel has taken note that the Educational Programme Committee (EPC) now ensures to pay explicit attention to the quality of the second year, which adds to the quality of this part of the programme and gives the EPC an opportunity to signal any issues, should they come up. The panel expects that the EPC (among others) always takes into consideration that programmes with a distinctive feature in Small-scale and intensive

education, are required to provide students with a learning environment that distinguishes from programmes without such a distinctive feature.

The introduction of PRO-F is not the only contributing factor in fulfilling the criteria of standard C. The programme builds on the strong foundations of year one, in which students enjoy a great tight-knit community and intensive and small-scale education in Maastricht. During the second year, when students embark on internships all over the world, they connect easily with each other via various means (e.g., social media). In addition, the programme pays ample attention to the personal guidance of students at the internship institutions.

In line with the issue of frequency and unavoidability of contact between students and Maastricht supervisors, the panel also discussed the work of mentors. Students are assigned the same mentor in year 1 and 2. Individual contact with mentors is mainly initiated by the students. The panel suggests that individual meetings with mentors could be made mandatory and initiated by the mentors themselves, rather than leaving the initiative to the students. A proactive approach by the mentors could positively contribute to pre-empt problems, especially with students who have a slightly more wait-and-see attitude.

A minor issue for the panel at the time of the reassessment, is that PRO-F was only just fully implemented in the academic year 2022-2023. As a result, the panel finds that this reassessment took place slightly too soon for it to really review all its effects. However, the lecturers of PRO-F are fully switched-on in developing and monitoring the success of PRO-F and the second-year students report on the added value already. The first concrete results of PRO-F evidently address the concerns expressed by the panel in its initial assessment.

The panel (and programme) is (are) aware of enquiries made by two students about the intensity and guidance in the second year in light of the increased tuition fees they pay. The panel considered this issue and found that these enquiries were made by students from cohort(s) predating the implementation of PRO-F. The panel considered the issue and encourages the programme to evaluate whether the concerns students may have had are/were addressed properly.

In conclusion, the panel finds that the programme has fulfilled the criteria belonging to Standard C. This is mainly based on the introduction of PRO-F, which has the advantage of building upon a very strong first year of the programme in terms of community building. However, the panel does find that PRO-F is a *minimum minimorum*: the programme should ensure that its efforts do not decrease. The panel encourages the programme to continue developing the second year with the standards of the distinctive feature top of mind.

Conclusion

Meets the standard.

5. Appendices

5.1 Documents studied

- Self-assessment report
- Appendices
 - Recovery plan based on the panel's assessment
 - Appendix B: PRO-F course manual
 - Appendix C: The education and assessment plans for the PRO-F course
 - Appendix D: Information provided about the regulations concerning the internships
 - Appendix E: Reflection report and questionnaires for evaluating internships of the Master Forensic Psychology
 - Appendix F: Minutes of the Educational Programme Committee meeting

5.2 Site visit programme

3 March 2023 (online)

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|---------------|--|
| 12.30 – 13.15 | Preparatory meeting panel |
| 13.15 – 13.30 | Meeting with programme management |
| 13.30 – 13.45 | Break |
| 13.45 – 14.30 | Meeting with second-year students |
| 14.30 – 14.45 | Break |
| 14.45 – 15.30 | Meeting with lecturers and educational programme committee |
| 15.30 – 15.45 | Break |
| 15.45 – 16.45 | Final panel meeting |
| 16.45 – 17.00 | Wrap-up: feedback panel findings to programme management and lecturers |