

Psychology A Level is delivered with the intent to engage and foster a genuine interest and inquisitiveness into the mind and human behaviour. Within this science students build skills of analysis and are actively encouraged to critique and evaluate theories and psychological research. The course has been planned to embed interleaving of content and the building of students' knowledge, skills and confidence from when they join the A Level, with the majority of students having little to no prior knowledge of psychology.

Following student feedback and some reorganisation and planning, the psychology A Level is now structured for both teachers to deliver one shared topic alongside each other. This has proven to be a preferred delivery style for the students and allows all students and staff to become fully immersed into one topic at a time. The division of the topics has been carefully planned to ensure there is logical continuation of learning between teachers. This structure also allows for greater rehearsal of content and specialist terminology and the drawing of links and examples across lessons.

Students complete a booklet of summer tasks prior to the start of the course and are provided with the log in details for our online textbooks to assist them if required. The work offers an insight into the course and aspects of the topics covered to help with their final subject selection and to prepare students for A Level study. Tasks include finding definitions of key terms and researching the key approaches along with elements related to memory, completing maths problems, labelling biological structures, and considering research methods terminology such as variables and ethics. Students are also given a large list of books and films that relate to various psychology topics should they wish to do some prior reading/watching or use these to support wider reading during the course.

Students begin the course with an introduction to research methods. As the largest and most crucial topic accounting for over 25% of the final A Level and underpinning the entire discipline it is imperative that students have a strong understanding of how psychological research is designed and conducted. The topic starts with constructing operationalised hypotheses and the experimental method including sampling methods, controlling extraneous variables and ethical implications before working through a range of techniques such as observations, interviews, case studies and content analysis. Students are required to apply mathematical knowledge and skills to the analysis and graphical presentation of data before gaining an understanding of probability and significance testing through the use of inferential statistical tests. Students must be able to recognise and justify their selection of the appropriate tests and then must interpret the results. Due to the size of the topic it is delivered in sub sections throughout the year. After the initial introduction students return to practise and build on their research methods knowledge in between each topic over the course of the first year. This emphasis on research methods not only benefits student's psychology progress across all areas but also overlaps and assists students who study subjects such as sociology. It is also a very common compulsory university module on a huge variety of degree courses from sports science to business management and marketing so provides highly transferable knowledge and skills for many students who chose to progress on to higher education.

Following research methods students learn the approaches topic. It is logical for this to be the first theory-based content as it covers the emergence and history of psychology followed by the six different psychological schools of thought and approaches to explaining behaviour. Students need to be aware of these approaches and understand the key theory and specialist terminology within each one before moving on to apply them to a range of behaviours. Throughout the rest of the first-year students are taught the following compulsory topics from the AQA specification; attachment, social influence, biopsychology, memory and psychopathology, with a two-week input of research methods between each. Decisions regarding the order include delivering biopsychology prior to

psychopathology as it includes the biological explanations and treatments for OCD, therefore requiring students to have a sound knowledge of the structure and functions of neurons along with the process of neural transmission.

In the second year, students begin by finishing any remaining research methods content. With this large area completed students will have covered all sub sections within two of the three exam papers. As a result of this students are able to practise full past exam papers which builds their confidence and knowledge of assessment questions and the exam structure and allows for maximum revision time for research methods in particular. The remainder of the second year is then dedicated to the sub sections of the paper three exam. Firstly, issues and debates which is the final compulsory topic drawing on a range of debates for example nature vs nurture as well as issues of gender bias and social sensitivity. The terms and concepts within this topic are first introduced within the evaluation of year one topics resulting in students already having examples to draw upon when looking at these issues in greater depth.

The option topics covered in the second year consist of schizophrenia, cognition and development and addiction. Schizophrenia has been selected to provide students with an insight and understanding into one of the most complicated, misunderstood and highly researched mental health conditions. Educating ourselves has grown all the more relevant and necessary in recent years with an increased awareness and the breaking down of stigmas surrounding mental health disorders. Given that the majority of the areas delivered on the course are regarding neurotypical and 'normal' behaviours such as forming an attachment between infant and caregiver, storing long term memories or conforming to peers; the schizophrenia module provides some diversity and variation from this; it also offers variation from the other option topics delivered. Furthermore, the majority of students really enjoy learning about OCD, phobias and depression in the year one psychopathology topic. However, this topic only offers a short overview of each disorder whereas schizophrenia gives us the opportunity to delve deeper into another classified abnormal behaviour. Schizophrenia has remained one of the option topics due to its popularity amongst students which has previously led to high engagement and it being a well examined area both within our school and nationally.

Cognition and development provides students with an insight into how mental processes occur and evolve including memory, perception and our understanding of the world. The focus is on how thinking and reasoning develops throughout childhood and includes key theories proposed by Piaget and Vygotsky. The topic has been selected to support and build on students' knowledge and understanding of earlier cognitive areas; cognitive approach and memory. As a contrast to the schizophrenia module, this topic covers behaviours that everyone will have experienced – developing the ability to assimilate and accommodate to understand the world around us.

For our final topic we opened the option to students to select their preference between addiction and aggression. An overwhelming majority selected addiction and felt that this was an area they were interested in studying. This selection also aligned with our views that addictions within society are an increasing concern, not only with substances such as drugs or alcohol as people may typically associate the term with but also with phones and any day-to-day items such as chocolate for example. This topic uses multiple previous theories of learning and students' knowledge of the brain's reward system and the role of dopamine to explain causes and then various treatments for addictions.

Following student requests, a number of years ago, we hold additional mock exams every year to provide further practise of full two-hour papers in exam conditions and the opportunity for greater

feedback. Consequently, students will have sat a full example of all three exam papers before the formal, external exams. In addition to this, each topic is assessed during the course of the two years, this may be through whole year group progress tests, timed class essays, quizzes and end of topic tests.

Student support runs throughout the course, after the first couple of weeks conversations are started with those who may be struggling to adapt to A Level study. Teachers liaise with tutors and parents and offer support to students to recap lesson content and address queries. Students can access all lesson materials on Teams should they wish to recap a lesson or catch up on anything missed. Student organisation is also supported through the modelling of how students can organise and file their class and independent work followed by folder checks during the year. To aid note taking students are provided with a booklet for each topic consisting of some content, areas to complete in lessons, activities and exam questions.

Wider reading is encouraged within psychology and students are provided with details of where to access a wide range of books, films, articles, Ted Talks & websites including Seneca and Massolit which contains short video explanations of aspects of the course created by university lecturers. Articles from the quarterly 'Psychology Review' magazine are scanned and shared with students to broaden their understanding of psychology in the real world and share with them recent research and findings beyond the specification. Periodically students are also shown an example of a career that studying psychology can lead to. Whilst students know of some more obvious careers such as psychological researcher or therapist, it is important to demonstrate how the subject can link to many other sectors; this also supports students research and application for University.

There is a choice for students to partake in peer mentoring within psychology. After the first progress tests in October we identify year 12 students who are struggling with the demands of the course and allocate them a year 13 peer mentor to meet with once a week. This is student led and requires the year 12's to identify where they need additional support, we have found that those who engage with this opportunity really benefit. This is also incredibly useful for the year 13 volunteers as it provides them with targeted revision time based on first year topics and tests and secures their knowledge and understanding by having to explain and teach their mentees. This also provides mentors with something additional they can share on personal statements.

Throughout the year there are weekly 'drop in' support sessions both after school and during one school day a week. From the February half term, the after school sessions then become targeted revision time for year 13 students in the run up to their final exams. These include a mixture of both recapping content in the form of mind maps/flash cards and reducing information down to key elements along with exam technique; analysing and planning responses to exam questions. Students are encouraged to work together when revising and to discuss and test each other alongside practising exam material in timed conditions.

When possible, the psychology department run trips, those which have previously proven very popular and educational have been a psychology university open day and a 'Science & Psychology' day of talks which was held by one of the main authors of the AQA approved textbook, Cara Flanagan. Tutor2U also hold very valuable exam skills and technique revision sessions which we aim to attend. In addition, Tutor2U run online revision webinars based on specific topics throughout the year. Information and links to these are provided to students and attendance is encouraged.