

The Psychology curriculum

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 are required 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, aggression and relationships. 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 specifies 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.

Aggression and relationships are taught partially due to previous student enjoyment and engagement as this is crucial to students enjoying the course and having the motivation to work hard and achieve their potential. They are also highly relevant and applicable topics that students can relate to experience of their own and others around them. As a behaviour that can often have negative and potentially dangerous implications, it is beneficial for students to understand a range of causes for aggression from biological triggers and chemical imbalances to the possible risk of repeated exposure to aggressive media.

Relationships is another relevant subject which is applicable and relatable for many students. It provides the opportunity for open and interesting discussion amongst students regarding different types of relationships and the various theories behind the formation, maintenance and break down of relationships. This topic also links in with PSHCE as it covers aspects associated with healthy relationships. As the specification is heavily focused on research surrounding heterosexual relationships as well as containing an evolutionary explanation which students can find to be oversimplified, there are many opportunities for students to apply their skills of analysis and to critique previous research and theories.

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.

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.