

Psychology A Level



COURSE DESCRIPTION

Psychology is the scientific study of the mind and behaviour. We examine competing theories as to how and why people think and behave in all the varied ways that they do, remembering that a theory must have evidence to substantiate it. Thus we take scientific approach to the evaluation of research evidence to discuss whether a theory can be said to be supported or valid.

Each lesson will introduce students to new concepts, so there is much to learn, but most students find it fascinating to try to understand themselves and the people they meet and see in the wider world.

Note that the emphasis throughout is on **science** – the need for investigations surrounding theories of the mind and behaviour, and analysis of the results of research in order to draw conclusions. Most lessons will discuss theories / explanations of psychological phenomena followed by an examination of the evidence (research) that has been undertaken by psychologists in this area. We then evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence in order to assess the validity of the theory, or compare this to another competing explanation of the same phenomenon.

Students will therefore learn about research methods, analysis of the results of research, debate the ethics of research studies and look at the practical application of research to the real world.

During the two years students will also complete 4 investigations in small groups (an experiment, questionnaire, observation and correlation). This will enable them to practice their research methods skills as well as data analysis.

SKILLS REQUIRED

- Fluency in written English and ability to construct logical argument.
- Good mathematical skills of computation and analysis.
- Understanding of scientific method. Ability to use technical scientific terminology.
- Participation in group debate and discussion.
- Ability to draw conclusions from evidence rather than personal opinion.
- We require students taking Psychology to have at least a grade 6 in both English Language and a Science subject **and** a grade 5 in Maths. This is because you will have to be comfortable with the use of statistical formulae and because you will be taking written examinations that require the production of coherent discussions about the subject matter. **Remember however, that this is a Science subject, most alike to Biology in content / format.**

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

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EXAM BOARD

AQA

PROGRAMME OF STUDY

Paper 1 topics

Memory and Forgetting, Social Influence, Attachment, Psychopathology.

1/3 of total A Level

Exam paper
2 hours

Paper 2 topics

Biopsychology, Approaches to psychology, Research Methods and Statistics

1/3 of total A Level

Exam paper
2 hours

Paper 3 topics

Issues and Debates, Stress, Cognitive Development, Aggression

1/3 of total A Level

Exam paper
2 hours

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Psychology results at GCH in 2020 were once again above national figures. 34% achieved A*/A (National = 28%), and 66% achieved A*/B (National = 56%). We are equally proud that only 3% at GCH achieved D/E grades, while the National figure was 17%.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

Students visit the Bethlem Museum (commonly known as 'Bedlam'), Freud Museum and the Wellcome Wing of the Science Museum.

Psychology club allows students to explore topics of interest that are not covered in the course.

Students are encouraged to participate in Taster Days and to attend lectures at many Universities.



FUTURE CAREERS

In terms of future careers, psychology can either become a career in itself (e.g. criminal psychologist, health psychologist, child psychologist, occupational psychologist, counsellor etc.), can be a useful asset to a career (such as in Law, Medicine, Teaching, Marketing, Social work etc.) or can simply be a way to expand your range of skills and knowledge base. Students from GCH have gone on to study a wide variety of courses, from medicine and law, to social work, archaeology, art and wine-making.

You will develop skills of both oral and written debate, knowledge of 'how science works' and will be encouraged to develop the skill of using knowledge from one area to assess or evaluate ideas and evidence from another that can be applied in many career areas.

EXAMINATIONS

The course is linear (meaning that all the assessment is at the end of the 2 years) and has no coursework. Grades are determined from results of 3 written papers, each of which is 2 hours and are equally weighted (worth the same % towards the final grade). Every paper will require skills of knowledge and understanding, discussion and analysis, and application (including research methods and statistics).

Please note that across the papers, the Research Methods and Statistics element is worth 33% of the total marks. Students must therefore be prepared for this and have good mathematical and scientific analytical skills.

All exams contain a mix of multiple choice, short answer and extended writing (essay) questions.

FAQs

Is it easy?

This is probably the most frequently asked question and one of the most difficult to answer! It is tough for everybody – *most people will not* have a GCSE foundation in psychology and everyone has a lot of new concepts and terminology to learn. However, if you have a genuine interest in understanding people and their behaviour, then the work should be inspiring rather than a chore.

You will therefore have to get from 'zero' to A level standard work fairly swiftly – not an easy task! Many people falsely think that they already 'know about' psychology, simply because they have a mind themselves. The scientific study of psychology is very different – we do not 'sit around talking about our dreams'!

There is homework every week, ranging from reading and note-taking, to completing exercises, writing essays and preparing for tests. We set high standards in the department and expect students to adhere to a good work ethic.

There has been poor publicity in the media about the perceived difficulty and academic rigour of psychology A level. It has been suggested that it is easy to get good grades, but in fact there is a far higher percentage of A and B grades in Maths than there is in Psychology!

Do Universities accept it?

YES! It is recognised by Universities as a worthwhile and academically rigorous A level. With only a few exceptions (such as veterinary science), *it is accepted as one of the A levels for entry to nearly ALL courses*. Students who have studied Psychology have gone on to study a vast range of University courses including Law and Medicine at a range of excellent Universities.

Do I need certain GCSE grades?

We require students taking Psychology to have at least a grade 6 in both English Language and a Science subject and a grade 5 in Mathematics. This is because you will have to be comfortable with the use of statistical formulae and because you will be taking written examinations that require the production of coherent discussions about the subject matter. **Remember however, that this is a Science subject, most alike to Biology in content / format.**

What can I take it with?

Psychology is a suitable choice for ANY subject combination. In the past students have studied it alongside other sciences, arts or humanities subjects and all have been able to use and transfer skills from one area to another to great benefit.

FAQs continued

What will we do in lessons?

Most lessons will discuss theories / explanations of psychological phenomena followed by an examination of the evidence (research) that has been undertaken by psychologists in this area. We then evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence in order to assess the validity of the theory, or compare this to another competing explanation of the same phenomenon. Through this you will therefore learn about research methods, analysis of the results of research, debate the ethics of research studies and look at the practical applications of research to the real world.

Whilst there is often no agreed 'right or wrong' way to evaluate, you will NOT be asked for your *own opinion*... when we evaluate research and theories it is through the use of evidence and an understanding of research methods and statistics.

What will this 'fit' me for?

Anything where an understanding of others, and empathy for their internal mental world will help you to interact with them and progress in life. You will develop skills of both oral and written debate, knowledge of 'how science works' and will be encouraged to develop the skill of using knowledge from one area to assess or evaluate ideas and evidence from another.

In terms of future careers, psychology can either become a career in itself (e.g. criminal psychologist, health psychologist, child psychologist, occupational psychologist, counsellor etc.), can be a useful asset to a career (such as in Law, Medicine, Teaching, Marketing, Social work etc.) or can simply be a way to expand your range of skills and knowledge base.