

PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology is offered at AS and A2 level. It is defined as the science of mind and behaviour, and psychologists attach considerable importance to observing and measuring the behaviour of participants in their studies. They also draw on introspective and behavioural evidence in order to understand the internal processes which lead people to think and behave in the ways they do.

As human beings, we are more interested in what drives us and others than in just about anything else, and that is what Psychology involves.

You can see something of the enormous extent of contemporary psychology by considering some of the following (random) selection of issues which have been addressed by psychologists.

- What happens when we dream?
- How much of your personality is due to genetics?
- How does human memory work?
- How does therapy cure mental disorders?
- What influence does the group have on the individual?

A level Syllabus: AQA (A) Psychology (AS) and (A2)

The aims of the AQA examination at AS and A2 level are to develop knowledge and understanding of the core topic areas in the subject. These include social, developmental, cognitive and physiological psychology; and also individual differences.

Assessment Pattern

The full A level course consists of six modules and the examination consists mainly of written essays and short answers. All students take three modules over the AS year. Those intending to take the full A level will go on to do another three modules, one of which comprises a 2000 word piece of course work, assessed through an investigation report carried out by the student.

Syllabus Content

Students are encouraged to develop skills of analysis, interpretation and evaluation of psychological theories and research skills in the core areas.

For example, social psychologists would claim all psychology is social psychology because all behaviour takes place within a social context. Even when alone, our behaviour continues to be influenced by others. Investigations into conformity and obedience show us how this might be (AS). Social psychology is also concerned with interpersonal behaviour e.g. pro and anti social behaviour, and by the influence of media (A2).

Developmental psychologists study the biological, cognitive, social and emotional changes that occur in people over time e.g. attachments during infancy (AS) and personality and gender development (A2).

Physiological psychology looks at the physical basis of behaviour, how the functions of the nervous system and the endocrine system are related to and influence behaviour and mental processes e.g. Stress (AS) and Sleep and Dreaming (A2).

Cognitive psychology looks at the mental processes involved in areas like memory (AS), perception, attention and language, which may have important practical implications too, such as understanding the memory processes involved in eyewitness testimony (AS).

Lastly, abnormal psychology studies the underlying causes of deviant behaviour and psychological abnormality; for example, schizophrenia, depression (A2) and eating disorders (AS).

Psychology and University Entrance

Psychology is well received at all universities and is on a par with other academic subjects. Some universities may accept Psychology as a science despite the theory-based course, this would need careful investigation at the relevant university. Career prospects in Psychology are wide and varied. The subject is rated highly by employers in business, marketing, the media and all general employment areas. It also opens up areas within the psychological profession such as child, occupational, forensic, clinical and sports psychology and psychiatry.