

Curriculum overview: Psychology

Psychology sits at a compelling intersection of science and humanity. It invites students to interrogate the very mechanisms through which we perceive, think, feel and act, applying rigorous empirical inquiry to the most complex subject of all: the human mind. Our curriculum is constructed to cultivate psychological literacy: the ability to think critically about behaviour, to evaluate evidence with precision, and to situate psychological knowledge within broader ethical, cultural and social frameworks.

At GCSE, students follow the OCR specification across Years 10 and 11. The course opens with Research Methods 1, equipping learners with the foundational scientific skills they will apply throughout, from hypothesis construction to critical appraisal of data. Research Methods 2 follows in Autumn 2, consolidating and extending methodological understanding. Students then encounter Social Influence and Memory before the year concludes with Sleep and Dreaming. In Year 11, students progress to Criminal Psychology, Development and Psychological Problems, before committing Spring 2 onwards to structured revision. This sequencing is deliberate: concepts and skills introduced early are systematically revisited and deepened, ensuring that prior knowledge acts as a scaffold rather than isolated content.

At A-Level, students follow the AQA specification across Years 12 and 13. Year 12 establishes the disciplinary architecture of the subject: Research Methods and Memory lay the scientific foundations; Social Influence and Biopsychology develop both substantive knowledge and analytical sophistication; Attachment, Clinical Psychology (Psychopathology), and the Approaches component consolidate and contextualise psychological enquiry across its major paradigms. Year 13 opens with Issues and Debates, establishing the synoptic lens through which all subsequent content is evaluated. Relationships, Schizophrenia and Aggression then provide rich opportunities for extended evaluative writing, before the course concludes with structured revision. The A-Level curriculum produces graduates who are not only knowledgeable about psychology but who think like psychologists.

Key skills/content requirements at GCSE

Content	Skills
→ Research Methods (1 & 2) → Social Influence → Memory → Sleep and Dreaming → Criminal Psychology → Development → Psychological Problems	→AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of psychological ideas, processes and procedures. →AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of psychological ideas, processes and procedures. →AO3: Analyse and evaluate psychological information, ideas, processes and procedures to make judgements and draw conclusions.

Key skills/content requirements at A Level

Content	Skills
→ Research Methods (1 & 2) → Memory → Social Influence → Attachment → Clinical Psychology → Approaches → Biopsychology → Relationships → Schizophrenia → Aggression → Issues and Debates	→AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures. →AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of scientific ideas, processes, techniques and procedures: in a theoretical context; in a practical context; when handling qualitative data; when handling quantitative data. →AO3: Analyse, interpret and evaluate scientific information, ideas and evidence, including in relation to issues, to: make judgements and reach conclusions; develop and refine practical design and procedures.

	Autumn 1 (Sep–Oct)	Autumn 2 (Nov–Dec)	Spring 1 & 2 (Jan–Mar)	Summer 1&2 (April–July)	Portable Knowledge	Key Terms
Year 10	Subject area – Research Methods 1 → Identify different types of variables. → Be able to write different types of hypotheses. → Understand and evaluate research designs. → Identify methods of sampling and their strengths and weaknesses. → Define and evaluate different research methods (experiments, interviews, questionnaires, correlations, case studies and observations). Subject area – Social Influence → Describe and explain situational factors: collective and crowd behaviour. → Describe and explain different types of conformity and their effect. → Describe and explain Asch's study and Reicher's study.	→ Describe and explain situational factors in obedience and how Milgram shows this. → Describe and explain dispositional factors: self-esteem, locus of control, morality, the brain. → Evaluate situational and dispositional factors. → Describe and evaluate key studies: Bickman (1972); NatCen (2011). → Explain how minority and majority influence affect social change Subject area – Memory → Identify and explain the different types of memory and how it is processed. → Explain the difference between the two types of amnesia. → Describe and evaluate the multi-store model of memory for recall.	→ Describe the different types of forgetting. → Describe and evaluate key study: Wilson et al (2008). → Describe, explain and evaluate the theory of reconstructive memory. → Describe and evaluate key study: Braun et al (2002). → Apply techniques for recall Subject area – Research Methods 2 → Describe different ethical issues and how to deal with these. → Analyse and evaluate types of data.	Subject area – Research Methods 2 → Understand and utilise descriptive statistics. → Construct and interpret tables, charts and graphs. → Identify and utilise different types of reliability. → Identify and utilise different types of validity. → Researcher and participant effects. → Sources of bias. MOCK EXAM Subject area – Sleep and Dreaming → Describe the functions, features, and benefits of sleep. → Describe and explain the neuropsychology of sleep. → Describe and explain the causes of sleep disorders. → Describe and evaluate Freud's theory of dreaming; key study: Freud (1918). → Describe and evaluate the Activation-Synthesis Theory. → Describe and evaluate key study: Williams et al (1992). → Apply knowledge of treatments for insomnia.	Students will have knowledge of: → Specialist psychological vocabulary, psychological concepts, terminology and conventions to engage in the process of psychological enquiry. → Knowledge and understanding of psychology, developing an understanding of self and others, and how psychological understanding can help to explain everyday social phenomena. → How psychological research is conducted, including the role of scientific method and data analysis. → How to present information, develop arguments and draw conclusions through a critical approach to psychological evidence. → The relationship between psychology and personal, moral, social and cultural issues, and ethical issues in psychology. → The contribution of psychology to individual, social and cultural diversity, and	Research Methods: Hypotheses, Alternate Hypotheses, Null Hypotheses, Variables, Independent Variable (IV), Dependent Variable (DV), Extraneous Variable (EV), Co-Variables, Experimental Designs, Independent Measures, Repeated Measures, Target Population, Sample, Representativeness, Generalisability, Random Sample, Opportunity Sample, Self-selected Sample, Respect, Competence, Responsibility, Integrity, Experiments (Laboratory/Field/Natural), Questionnaires, Closed-ended Questions, Rating Scales, Observations (Naturalistic/Controlled/Overt/Covert/Participant/Non-Participant), Case Study, Correlations (Positive/Negative/Zero), Qualitative Data, Quantitative Data, Primary Data, Secondary Data, Central Tendency, Median, Mode, Mean, Range, Frequency Tables, Bar Chart, Pie Chart, Histograms, Line Graphs, Scatter Graphs, Reliability (Internal/External/Inter-rater), Validity (Ecological/Population/Construct), Demand Characteristics, Observer Effect, Social Desirability, Gender Bias, Cultural Bias, Age Bias, Experimenter Bias, Observer Bias. Issues and Debates: Nature versus Nurture, Freewill vs Determinism, Reductionism vs Holism. Social Influence: Anti-social Behaviour, Authority, Dispositional Factors, Locus of Control, Majority Influence, Minority Influence, Obedience, Pro-social Behaviour, Situational Factors, Social Influence.

	→ Describe and explain deindividuation. → Describe and explain the effect of culture on pro- and anti-social behaviour.				how psychology contributes to society.	Memory: Anterograde Amnesia, Autobiographical Memory, Cues, Forgetting, Interference, Long-term Memory, Procedural Memory, Retrieval Cues, Retrograde Amnesia, Schemas, Short-term Memory, Working Memory. Sleep and Dreaming: Dreaming, Endogenous Pacemakers, Exogenous Zeitgebers, Fantasies, Infantile Neurosis, Insomnia, Primal Scene, Psychoanalysis, Psychosexual Development, Stages of Development, REM, REM Sleep, Sleep Disorders.
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	Autumn 1 (Sep–Oct)	Autumn 2 (Nov–Dec)	Spring 1 (Jan–Feb)	Spring 2 onwards (Feb–Jul)	Key terms
Year 11	Subject area – Criminal Psychology → Define different types of crime and how it is measured. → Explain how Social Learning Theory causes crime and evaluate. → Describe and evaluate the key study: Cooper and Mackie (1986). → Define and evaluate Eysenck's Criminal Personality Theory. → Describe and evaluate the key study: Heaven (1996). → Explain ways of reducing criminal activity and the role of rehabilitation.	Subject area – Development → Describe stages of development with identification of parts of the nervous system. → Define the stages of brain development. → Identify and evaluate the use of psychological testing. → Describe and evaluate Piaget's theory of cognitive development. → Describe and evaluate the key study: Piaget (1952). → Define and evaluate Dweck's theory. → Define and evaluate Willingham's theory. → Describe and evaluate the key study: Blackwell (2007). → Apply Piaget and Dweck's theory to the role of education. MOCK EXAM	Subject area – Psychological Problems → Define mental health in different ways and describe the prevalence and significance of mental ill health. → Explain changing attitudes to mental health. → Identify the effects of significant mental health problems. → Describe the clinical characteristics of Schizophrenia. → Identify and evaluate the nature vs nurture theories of schizophrenia. → Describe and evaluate key study: Daniel et al (1991). → Describe the clinical characteristics of Depression. → Identify and evaluate the nature vs nurture theories of depression. → Describe and evaluate key study: Tandoc et al (2015). → Explain the different treatments for Schizophrenia and depression.	Spring 2 onwards is reserved for overspill lessons and revision of all topics.	Criminal Psychology: Delinquency, Deterrent, Extraversion, Internalisation, Neuroticism, Psychoticism, Punishment, Reinforcement, Rewards, Role model, Self-Esteem, Socialisation. Development: Animism, Conservation, Fixed Mindsets, Growth Mindsets, Intelligence, Object Permanence. Psychopathological Problems: Anti-depressants, Anti-psychotics, Clinical Depression, DSM, Discrimination, ICD, Mental Health, Psychotherapy, Schizophrenia, Stigma, WHO.

GCSE external assessment: Two papers each 1 hour and 30 minutes long and worth 50% of the GCSE. Graded 9–1.

	Autumn 1 & 2 (Sep–Dec)	Spring 1 & 2 (Jan–Mar)	Summer 1 & 2 (Apr–Jul)	Portable knowledge	Key terms
Year 12	Subject area – Research Methods → Aims and hypotheses; operationalisation of variables. → Sampling strategies: random, opportunity, volunteer. → Pilot studies and experimental designs. → Questionnaires; variables and control. → Demand characteristics and investigator effects. → Data handling and analysis: quantitative and qualitative data. → Primary and secondary data; levels of measurement. Subject area – Social Influence → Types of conformity: internalisation, identification, compliance. → Explanations for conformity: informational and normative social influence. → Conformity to social roles as investigated by Zimbardo. → Explanations for obedience; Milgram's research. → Dispositional explanation: the Authoritarian Personality. → Explanations of resistance to social influence. → Minority influence: consistency, commitment and flexibility. → The role of social influence processes in social change. Subject area – Memory → The multi-store model of memory. → Types of long-term memory: episodic, semantic, procedural. → The working memory model. → Explanations for forgetting. → Factors affecting the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. → Improving the accuracy of eyewitness testimony.	Subject area – Attachment → Caregiver-infant interactions in humans; interactional synchrony. → Stages of attachment identified by Schaffer. → Animal studies of attachment: Lorenz and Harlow. → Explanations of attachment: learning theory and Bowlby's monotropic theory. → The concepts of a critical period and an internal working model. → Ainsworth's Strange Situation; types of attachment. → Cultural variations in attachment, including van Ijzendoorn. → Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation; Romanian orphan studies. → The influence of early attachment on childhood and adult relationships. Subject area – Clinical Psychology (Psychopathology) → Definitions of abnormality. → Behavioural, emotional and cognitive characteristics of phobias, depression and OCD. → Behavioural approach: explaining and treating phobias. → Cognitive approach: explaining and treating depression. → Biological approach: explaining and treating OCD.	Subject area – Approaches → Learning approaches: behaviourism and social learning theory. → The cognitive approach. → The biological approach. → Psychodynamic approach. → Humanistic approach. → Comparison of approaches. MOCK EXAM Subject area – Biopsychology → The divisions of the nervous system: central and peripheral. → Structure and function of sensory, relay and motor neurons. → The process of synaptic transmission. → The function of the endocrine system; the fight or flight response. → Localisation of function in the brain and hemispheric lateralisation. → Plasticity and functional recovery of the brain after trauma. → Ways of studying the brain.	Students will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of: → Psychological concepts, theories, research studies, research methods and ethical issues. → Application of psychological knowledge and understanding to a range of contexts. → Analysis, interpretation and evaluation of psychological concepts, theories, research studies and research methods. → Evaluate therapies and treatments in terms of their appropriateness and effectiveness. → Knowledge and understanding of research methods, practical research skills and mathematical skills.	Agentic state, Aversion therapy, Authoritarian personality, Beck's Negative Triad, Co-morbidity, Correlation, Co-variables, De-individuation, Demand characteristics, fMRI, Hemispheric lateralisation, Interactional Synchrony, Interference, Internal working model, Introspection, Levels of explanation, Locus of control, Mediation processes, Meta-analysis, Monotropic theory, Operationalisation of variables, Paradigms, Quasi experiment, Retrieval Failure, Synaptic transmission, Systematic desensitisation, Thematic Analysis, Vicarious reinforcement.

	Autumn 1 & 2 (Sep–Dec)	Spring 1 & 2 (Jan–Mar)	Summer 1 & 2 (Apr–Jul)	Portable knowledge	Key terms
Year 13	Subject area – Issues and Debates → Gender and culture in psychology. → Free will and determinism. → The nature-nurture debate. → Holism and reductionism. → Idiographic and nomothetic approaches. → Ethical implications of research studies and theory, including reference to social sensitivity. Subject area – Relationships → The evolutionary explanations for partner preferences. → Factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships. → Theories of romantic relationships: social exchange, equity, Rusbult's investment model. → Virtual relationships in social media. → Parasocial relationships.	Subject area – Schizophrenia → Classification of schizophrenia. → Positive and negative symptoms of schizophrenia. → Reliability and validity in diagnosis and classification of schizophrenia. → Biological explanations for schizophrenia: genetics, dopamine hypothesis. → Psychological explanations for schizophrenia: cognitive, family dysfunction. → Drug therapy; CBT and family therapy; token economies. → The interactionist approach in explaining and treating schizophrenia. Subject area – Aggression → Neural and hormonal mechanisms in aggression. → Genetic factors in aggressive behaviour. → Ethological explanations; evolutionary explanations of human aggression. → Social psychological theories: frustration-aggression hypothesis, social learning theory. → Institutional aggression. → Media influences on aggression.	Revision → Structured revision of all A-level topics. → Extended essay practice and examination technique. → Consolidation of Issues and Debates across all topics. → Targeted past paper practice under timed conditions.	As above.	Androcentrism, Avolition, Congruence, Conditions of worth, Cultural relativism, Diathesis-stress model, Differential association theory, Gating, Hostile attribution bias, Interactionist approach, Self-actualisation, Parasocial relationships, Deindividuation, Frustration-aggression hypothesis, Dopamine hypothesis.

A Level external assessment: Three papers each 2 hours long and worth 33.3% of the A Level. Graded A*–E.

SMSC in Psychology

Spiritual development

Psychology, as the scientific study of mind and behaviour, is inherently concerned with the questions that lie at the heart of spiritual development: Who are we? Why do we act as we do? What does it mean to be human? Throughout both the OCR GCSE and AQA A-Level courses, students are consistently invited to reflect on their own mental processes, motivations and emotional responses in light of psychological theory. Units such as Social Influence challenge students to interrogate their understanding of autonomy and moral agency; Attachment invites profound reflection on the formative bonds that shape identity; and Psychological Problems (GCSE) and Schizophrenia (A-Level) develop sensitivity to the spectrum of human experience, including suffering and resilience. Lessons are structured to encourage debate across multiple viewpoints, fostering the capacity for self-reflection and an appreciation of perspectives that extend beyond the individual.

Moral development

Ethical inquiry is not peripheral to psychology — it is constitutive of it. At both GCSE and A-Level, students engage substantively with research ethics as a topic in its own right. They become familiar with the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (BPS) and are required to apply these principles to their own practical research activities. Landmark studies, including Milgram's obedience research and Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment, are evaluated not only in terms of their empirical contribution but through sustained moral analysis: Was the research justified? What obligations do researchers hold towards participants and society? At A-Level, Issues and Debates demands that students grapple with the ethical implications of psychological theory and research for socially sensitive populations. This develops nuanced moral reasoning grounded in evidence, not assertion.

Social development

The collaborative and discursive nature of psychological study makes it an outstanding vehicle for social development. Students are regularly required to engage in structured academic discussion, debate contested theoretical positions and collaborate on research design and data collection activities. A-Level extended essay writing demands that students not merely state viewpoints but construct, counter and refine arguments using carefully selected empirical evidence — a process that builds intellectual confidence and respect for reasoned disagreement. Group research projects at both levels require students to negotiate roles, distribute responsibilities and communicate findings: skills of direct relevance to adult civic and professional life. Psychology also develops empathy as a cognitive and social skill, equipping students to understand others' behaviour and mental states with greater accuracy and compassion.

Cultural development

A recurring and explicit theme across the psychology curriculum is the interrogation of cultural bias in research and theory. Students at GCSE are introduced to the concept of cultural bias as a methodological concern; at A-Level, this develops into a sophisticated understanding of ethnocentrism, cultural relativism and the dangers of universalising findings from culturally specific samples. Topics such as Attachment (including van Ijzendoorn's cross-cultural meta-analysis), Social Influence (variations across collectivist and individualist cultures) and Abnormality (culturally contingent definitions of psychological disorder) all require students to situate psychological knowledge within its cultural context. In doing so, students develop a critically informed awareness of diversity, recognising that explanations of human behaviour must account for the profound influence of culture, and that psychological science carries both the capacity and the responsibility to represent all of humanity.