

Psychology & Sociology

Overview of the Curriculum

For both A Level Psychology and A Level Sociology we follow the AQA specifications. We believe that these AQA courses ensure students cover the fundamental concepts and key approaches in each subject in the context of topics that our students find engaging and relatable to their own life experiences. The courses cover significant research studies, without an overemphasis on these; this allows us to bring more recent and relevant studies to the classroom to ensure students are up-to-date with current developments in these fields.

In our view, the topics covered provide students with experience of the areas they will likely study within many Psychology or Sociology degree courses. Both specifications include core (compulsory) topics, but also offer optional topics. Considering staff expertise and students' interests, the optional topics studied are:

- Psychology: Forensic Psychology, Relationships and Schizophrenia
- Sociology: The Media or Beliefs in Society and Family & Households

The sequence of topics has been refined through experience of teaching of the course. In Psychology, students start Year 12 with Psychopathology, the study and treatment of mental illness. From our experience and feedback from students, this is a topic they find especially engaging and so ensures a positive start to the course. After an introductory unit in Sociology, students start Year 12 studying Education and then Family, where they are able to more easily draw on life experiences.

When studying each topic area, students build their knowledge and understanding but must then develop the skills to apply this to different real-life scenarios and apply the theories and research studies in the classroom. In assessments, there is a heavier weighting of marks for evaluating and we believe that the emphasis on developing these skills benefits students' performance in all their studies, not just our subjects.

Overview of schemes of work

PSYCHOLOGY

A Level Psychology: Year 12

In Year 12, the following core (compulsory) topics are covered. Each topic introduces students to a different psychological approach. The learning within each topic is specified by the exam board, but some key points are identified below.

Attachment (Developmental Psychology): Students consider how psychological research has impacted changes in social policy, for example, the looked after children system, maternity/paternity leave.

Social influence (Social Psychology): This topic looks at important historical studies that were highly unethical but also made some defining points regarding human behaviour, for example, Milgram's study on obedience.

Memory (Cognitive psychology): Students will learn strategies that they can apply to their own learning.

Psychopathology (Abnormal Psychology): Students study OCD, phobias and depression (Cognitive Psychology). These have been chosen by AQA as they are currently the most common conditions amongst our young people. It is hoped 'knowledge is power' and the curriculum can empower our students to be successful, whatever their experience of these conditions in their own life and when working with others. Complemented by the visit to the Freud Museum in London

Approaches in Psychology: This is a discrete topic, but also referred to when teaching the topics detailed above. Humanism, learning theory, cognitive, biological, psychodynamic are all covered in depth.

Research Methods: Students cover the different types of research methods, as well as how to conduct research. Mathematics skills are revisited to enable analysis of data at a descriptive and inferential level. Students will design and carry out their own research.

Biological Psychology: The brain is the focus for this topic. Recent developments in technology, which have allowed new ways of studying the brain, will be introduced along with case studies of individuals who have recovered from brain injury or trauma. Six key areas of the brain are focused on in terms of their location and function. The Brain Day event in the Summer of Year 12 compliments and extends this topic and provides links to study at university level.

A Level Psychology: Year 13

The curriculum in Year 13 builds on information presented in Year 12, with links between topics explicitly taught. The topics studied in Year 13 are the optional topics of Relationships, Schizophrenia and Forensic Psychology.

Relationships: The course covers evolutionary explanations for partner preferences, factors affecting the formation and breakdown of romantic relationships, virtual relationships and parasocial relationships.

Schizophrenia: Students study the diagnosis and classification of schizophrenia, biological and psychological explanations and treatments. Complemented by the visit to the Freud Museum in London

Forensic Psychology: This topic includes offender profiling, biological and psychological explanations of offending behaviour and strategies for dealing with offender behaviour.

Students may also have the opportunity to participate in a Forensic Workshop where they study real life crime cases and apply their learning from lessons to solve the crime.

Issues and debates in Psychology: In this unit areas covered are

Debates covered:

- Nature versus Nurture
- Freewill versus Determinism
- Reductionism versus Holism
- Nomothetic versus Idiographic

Issues Covered:

- Ethics and Social Sensitivity in theories and research
- Culture Bias in theories and research
- Gender Bias In theories and research

Research Methods: In this topic there is a specific focus on inferential statistics and other mathematical skills

SOCIOLOGY

A Level Sociology: Year 12

The learning within each topic studied in Year 12 is specified by the exam board, but some key points are identified below.

An introduction to Sociology: This introductory unit studied at the start of the course covers two core themes of the A Level Sociology course:

- Socialisation, culture and identity
- Social differentiation, power and stratification.

These themes are threads running through all of the topics covered on the course. This unit of work is not explicitly examined, but provides a foundation for all other topics. The Liverpool culture & research trip supports the learning in this topic, with students looking at changes in views on diversity over time.

Families & Households: In this topic, students question the notion of what is a family and look at changes that have occurred in the institution of the 'family' over time. Students consider different perspectives on the family; positive, postmodern and critical.

Research methods: This topic focuses on research methods sociologists have used in the context of the topics of 'Education'. When studying this unit, students are encouraged to draw on their own experience.

Education: Students consider changes in policies and also explore how inequalities affect achievement. Students are encouraged to be reflective and see beyond their immediate experience, considering issues such as a hidden curriculum.

A Level Sociology: Year 13

The topics studied in Year 13 are:

Media: Students are encouraged to be critical of current media formats and how and why news is presented and for whose benefit.

Beliefs in Society: Students cover different sociological perspectives on religion and its role in society. Also the development of New Religious Movements and the effect of globalisation on beliefs in society.

Crime and Deviance: As part of this topic, students consider how the crime rate is measured as well as exploring the reasons behind the different proportions of ethnic groups, gender, social class represented in the statistics. So students can apply their learning, there may be an opportunity to take part in a Forensic Workshop. Students study real life crime cases and apply their learning to solve the crime.

Theory & Methods: Through the study of this topic, the link is formed between a sociologist's theoretical stance and the research methods they would use.

SMSC in Psychology and Sociology

Spiritual development within Psychology and Sociology encourages students to explore fundamental questions about identity, belief, and the human condition. Students examine issues such as discrimination, inequality, mental health, and social justice, reflecting on how these experiences shape individual and collective meaning. Through topics such as ethical research practices, cultural norms, and personal identity formation, students are prompted to evaluate their own values and beliefs. They are encouraged to engage with differing perspectives and to consider how spiritual and emotional well-being contributes to personal and societal development. This reflective process supports empathy, self-awareness, and deeper understanding of the human experience across diverse contexts. Brain Day encourages a sense of awe and wonder as well as raising issues of reductionism.

Moral development is cultivated through the critical analysis of ethical dilemmas, social norms, and the moral implications of human behavior. Students explore a variety of case studies, including controversial psychological experiments, social deviance, and responses to systemic injustice. This enables them to engage with multiple viewpoints and assess the consequences of actions from both individual and societal perspectives. Discussions around informed consent, confidentiality, and the rights of research participants further develop ethical awareness. The curriculum encourages students to make reasoned judgments about real-world issues, promoting the development of a moral compass grounded in compassion, fairness, and social responsibility.

Social development is fostered through collaboration, discussion, and analysis of group behavior and societal structures. Students work together on research projects, engage in peer discussions, and examine how individuals function within groups and institutions. Topics such as socialisation, group dynamics, and the role of family, education, and media are used to explore how individuals are shaped by and contribute to society. Through interactive learning, students develop communication, cooperation, and leadership skills, preparing them to be active participants in a diverse and interconnected world. The visit to the Freud museum allows students to collaborate with each other as well as share memories.

Cultural development involves understanding the influence of culture on behavior, identity, and societal norms. Students study a wide range of cultural perspectives and traditions to gain insight into how beliefs, practices, and values vary across the globe. They analyse how cultural identity influences psychological and social outcomes, and how multiculturalism and globalisation affect community dynamics. Exposure to different worldviews and social systems helps students appreciate diversity and develop cultural sensitivity, critical in both academic and real-world contexts. Guest speakers, documentary analysis, and case studies are often used to bring cultural issues to life. The Liverpool day trip enables students to experience workshops run by ex-convicts as well as an education into slavery & the experiences of enslaved people groups.

Examples of Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development in Psychology and Sociology include:

- Analysing the moral implications of classic psychological studies, such as Milgram's obedience experiment.
- Investigating the psychological and social effects of unemployment or social exclusion on individuals and communities.
- Examining the role of family, peer groups, and media in the process of socialisation.
- Exploring the cultural construction of gender roles and how these impact mental health and societal expectations.
- Debating ethical considerations in sociological research, such as participant confidentiality and informed consent.
- Comparing cultural attitudes toward mental illness and how these influence treatment and stigma.