

GCE A LEVEL

WJEC Eduqas GCE A LEVEL in PSYCHOLOGY

ACCREDITED BY OFQUAL

SPECIFICATION

Teaching from 2015
For award from 2017

Version 6 August 2026

SUMMARY OF AMENDMENTS

Version	Description	Page number
2	'Making entries' section has been amended to clarify resit rules.	16
3	We have removed the Personal Investigation titles for 2018 and 2019, and added new Personal Investigation titles for 2022 and 2023 within Appendix B	19
4	We have removed the Personal Investigation titles for 2020 and 2021, and added new Personal Investigation titles for 2024 and 2025 within Appendix B	19
5	We have removed the Personal Investigation titles for 2022 and 2023, and added new Personal Investigation titles for 2026 and 2027 within Appendix B	19
6	We have removed the Personal Investigation titles for 2024 and 2025, and added new Personal Investigation titles for 2028 and 2029 within Appendix B	19

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A LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT

Component 1: Psychology: Past to Present

Written examination: **2 hours 15 minutes**

33⅓% of qualification

100 marks

Compulsory questions relating to five psychological approaches, classic pieces of research evidence and a contemporary debate.

Component 2: Psychology: Investigating Behaviour

Written examination: **2 hours 15 minutes**

33⅓% of qualification

100 marks

Principles of research

Compulsory questions on how psychological investigations are carried out (including social and developmental psychology).

Personal investigations

Compulsory questions based on two investigative activities carried out prior to the assessment.

Application of research methods to a novel scenario

Compulsory questions requiring a response to a piece of research.

Component 3: Psychology:
Implications in the Real World

Written examination: **2 hours 15 minutes**

33⅓% of qualification

100 marks

Applications

A choice of three structured questions from six on psychological behaviours.

Controversies

One question from a choice of two requiring a synoptic exploration of psychological controversies.

This linear qualification will be available in the summer series each year. It will be awarded for the first time in summer 2017.

Qualification Accreditation Number: 601/6044/5

A LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims and objectives

This WJEC Eduqas A level specification in Psychology is stimulating, distinctive and attractive, providing exciting opportunities for the learners to:

- study a variety of historical and current psychological approaches
- study classic and contemporary psychological research covering a variety of perspectives and topics
- study principles of investigating human and animal behaviour
- apply psychological information to everyday situations
- explore contemporary issues raised in psychological research
- work scientifically through their own psychological research
- demonstrate greater emphasis on the skills of psychology.

This specification encourages learners to:

- develop essential knowledge and understanding of different areas of psychology and how they relate to each other
- develop and demonstrate a deep appreciation of the skills, knowledge and understanding of scientific methods in psychology
- develop competence and confidence in a variety of practical, mathematical and problem solving skills
- develop their interest in and enthusiasm for psychology, including developing an interest in further study and careers associated with the subject
- understand how society makes decisions about psychological issues and how psychology contributes to the success of the economy and society.

1.2 Prior learning and progression

There are no prior learning requirements. Any requirements set for entry to a course following this specification are at the discretion of centres. It is reasonable to assume that many learners will have achieved qualifications equivalent to Level 2 at KS4. Skills in Science, Numeracy/Mathematics, Literacy/English and Information Communication Technology will provide a sound basis for progression to this qualification.

Some learners will have already gained knowledge, understanding and skills through their study of psychology at GCSE or GCE AS.

Mathematical requirements are specified in the subject criteria and repeated in Appendix A of this specification.

This specification provides a suitable foundation for the study of psychology or a related area through a range of higher education courses, progression to the next level of vocational qualifications or employment. In addition, the specification provides a coherent, satisfying and worthwhile course of study for learners who do not progress to further study in this subject.

This specification is not age specific and, as such, provides opportunities for learners to extend life-long learning.

1.3 Equality and fair assessment

This specification may be followed by any learner, irrespective of gender or ethnic, religious or cultural background. It has been designed to avoid, where possible, features that could, without justification, make it more difficult for a learner to achieve because they have a particular protected characteristic.

The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The specification has been discussed with groups who represent the interests of a diverse range of learners, and the specification will be kept under review.

Reasonable adjustments are made for certain learners in order to enable them to access the assessments (e.g. candidates are allowed access to a Sign Language Interpreter, using British Sign Language). Information on reasonable adjustments is found in the following document from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ): *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments: General and Vocational Qualifications*.

This document is available on the JCQ website (www.jcq.org.uk). As a consequence of provision for reasonable adjustments, very few learners will have a complete barrier to any part of the assessment.

2 SUBJECT CONTENT

This specification is intended to ensure that learners gain a comprehensive appreciation of the nature of psychology and psychological enquiry. Through the specification learners will be introduced to historical and current psychological approaches and classic and contemporary research. In addition there are opportunities to explore psychological controversies and debates.

Learners will also study a variety of methods used by psychologists and will carry out their own investigations. Consideration of the ethical issues and implications of psychological endeavours are emphasised in all aspects of the specification.

The content is stimulating, relevant and accessible to a wide range of learners, ensuring both breadth and depth to the study of psychology.

2.1 Component 1

Psychology: Past to Present

Written examination: 2 hours 15 minutes

33⅓% of qualification

The purpose of this component is to give a solid grounding in some of the basic core aspects of psychology. The intention therefore is to allow the learner, through the study of classic research, to gain an appreciation that psychology continues to develop and evolve. The early ideas should not be dismissed but rather studied in context with consideration of the advances made in more recent years. Learners will be asked to explore contemporary debates using their knowledge and understanding of the five approaches (biological, psychodynamic, behaviourist, cognitive and positive); through these approaches learners will also gain an appreciation of the fields of social and developmental psychology.

For each of the five psychological approaches it will be necessary for learners to:

- know and understand the assumptions
- apply the assumptions to explain a variety of behaviours
- know and understand how the approach can be used in therapy (one therapy per approach)
- know and understand the main components of the therapy
- evaluate the therapy (including its effectiveness and ethical considerations)
- evaluate the approach (including strengths, weaknesses and comparison with the four other approaches)
- know, understand and make judgements on a classic piece of evidence (including methodology, procedures, findings, conclusions, ethical issues and social implications)
- explore both sides of the contemporary debate from a psychological perspective (including the ethical, social and economical implications).

Component 1: Content to be taught

Approach	Assumptions (including)	Therapy (one per approach)	Classic research	Contemporary debate
Biological	- evolutionary influences - localisation of brain function - neurotransmitters	drug therapy OR psychosurgery	Raine, A., Buchsbaum, M. and LaCasse, L. (1997) <i>Brain abnormalities in murderers indicated by positron emission tomography</i> . Biological Psychiatry, 42(6), 495-508	the ethics of neuroscience
Psychodynamic	- influence of childhood experiences - the unconscious mind - tripartite personality	dream analysis OR psychodrama	Bowlby, J. (1944) <i>Forty-four juvenile thieves: Their characters and home-life</i> . International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 25 (19-52), 107-127	the mother as primary care-giver of an infant
Behaviourist	- blank slate - behaviour learnt through conditioning - humans and animals learn in similar ways	aversion therapy OR systematic desensitisation	Watson, J.B. and Rayner, R. (1920) <i>Conditioned emotional reactions</i> . Journal of Experimental Psychology, 3(1), 1-14	using conditioning techniques to control the behaviour of children
Cognitive	- computer analogy - internal mental processes - schemas	cognitive behavioural therapy OR rational emotive behaviour therapy	Loftus, E. and Palmer, J.C. (1974) <i>Reconstruction of automobile destruction: an example of the interaction between language and memory</i> . Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behaviour, 13, 585-589	reliability of eye-witness testimony
Positive	- acknowledgement of free will - authenticity of goodness and excellence - focus on 'the good life'	mindfulness OR quality of life therapy	Myers, D.G. and Diener, E. (1995) <i>Who is happy?</i> Psychological Science, 6(1), 10-17	relevance of positive psychology in today's society

2.2 Component 2

Psychology: Investigating Behaviour

Written examination: 2 hours 15 minutes

33⅓% of qualification

The purpose of this component is for learners to acquire the skills of working scientifically.

Principles of research

The central aspect for this component is that of psychological research, from the initial planning stages through to analysing and evaluating. It is designed to introduce learners to the methodologies used by psychologists and to gain an appreciation of the impact of choices made on the outcomes of the research. Learners should appreciate the limitations of scientific research and when dealing with the complexities of humans as test material, there are several issues which need to be considered. In order to contextualise some aspects of research methods learners are required to consider the methodologies used by both social and developmental psychology

Personal investigations

To ensure true appreciation of the principles of psychological investigation the learners are expected to gain first-hand experience of two research methods. Learners will be required to respond to questions concerning these investigations in the assessment. The two investigations required each year are outlined in Appendix B. Learners are encouraged to use ICT in researching, designing, analysing and presenting their investigation. Learners will be expected to apply their knowledge of research methods to each investigation, including the following aspects: hypotheses; variables; methodology (including experimental design if appropriate); sampling; descriptive statistics; graphical representations; inferential statistics; reliability; validity; ethics.

Application of research methods to a novel scenario

The third aspect of this component is for learners to apply their knowledge and understanding of research methods to novel research scenarios, making judgements on the details of psychological research.

Component 2: Content to be taught

Learners will be expected to demonstrate:
knowledge, understanding and evaluation of: Social Psychology: Milgram, S. (1963). Behavioural study of Obedience. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 67, 371-8 Developmental Psychology: Kohlberg, L. (1968). The child as a moral philosopher. Psychology Today, 2, 25-30.
Deciding on a research question knowledge and understanding of: • aim of the research • research hypotheses • alternative (or experimental) hypotheses • directional and non-directional hypotheses • null hypotheses • independent variables • dependant variables • co-variables • operationalisation of variables • confounding variables • extraneous variables

Methodologies

knowledge, understanding and evaluation of:

- experiments
- quasi-experiments
- participant observations
- non-participant observations
- content analysis
- structured interviews / questionnaires
- semi-structured interviews
- correlational studies
- case studies
- brain scans
- longitudinal studies
- cross-sectional studies
- self-reports

Both quantitative data and qualitative data should be included.

Both primary and secondary sources should be included.

Location of research

knowledge, understanding and evaluation of:

- conducting research in a laboratory environment
- conducting research in the field
- conducting research on-line

Participants

knowledge, understanding and evaluation of:

- target populations
- sampling frames
- random sampling
- opportunity sampling
- systematic sampling
- stratified sampling
- quota sampling
- self-selected sampling
- snowball sampling
- observational sampling techniques (including event sampling, time sampling)

Experimental design

knowledge, understanding and evaluation of:

- independent groups
- repeated measures
- matched pairs

Levels of measurement

knowledge and understanding of:

- nominal data
- ordinal data
- interval data
- ratio data

Graphical representation

knowledge of, and be able to construct and interpret:

- frequency tables
- graphical representation (including line graphs, histograms, bar charts, pie charts, scatter diagrams)
- distribution curves (including normal, positive and negative skewed distributions)

Descriptive statistics

knowledge, evaluation, interpretation, estimation and calculation of:

- measures of central tendency (including mean $\frac{\sum x}{n}$, median and mode)
- measures of dispersion (including range and standard deviation $\sqrt{\frac{\sum (x-\bar{x})^2}{n-1}}$)
-

Inferential statistics

knowledge, appropriate application and interpretation of:

- Chi Square test
- Mann Whitney U test
- Sign test
- Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient
- Wilcoxon matched pairs signed ranks test
- probability values
- significance levels
- observed (calculated) values
- critical values from tables
- appropriate symbols ($=$, $\leq$, $<$, $>$, $\geq$)

Reliability

knowledge, understanding and application of:

- internal reliability
- external reliability
- ways of dealing with issues of reliability
- assessing reliability (including inter-rater reliability, test-retest reliability, split-half reliability)

Validity

knowledge, understanding and application of:

- internal validity
- external validity
- specific validity issues (including researcher bias, demand characteristics, social desirability)
- ways of dealing with issues of validity
- assessing validity (including concurrent, predictive, face, content and construct validity)

Ethics

knowledge, understanding and application of:

- confidentiality
- deception
- risk of stress, anxiety, humiliation or pain
- risk to the participants' values, beliefs, relationships, status or privacy
- valid consent
- working with vulnerable individuals (including children)
- working with animals
- managing the risk posed by ethical issues (including the use of ethics committees and ethical guidelines)

The role of the scientific community in validating new knowledge

knowledge, understanding and application of

- peer review
- format for reporting psychological investigations

You should also refer to Appendix A for full list of required mathematical skills.

2.3 Component 3

Psychology: Implications in the Real World

Written examination: 2 hours 15 minutes

33⅓% of qualification

Having learnt about the various psychological approaches in Component 1, learners are expected to apply this knowledge and understanding to human/animal behaviours. Learners should be able to explain and draw conclusions about the possible causes of these behaviours and understand that psychology has the potential to impact on society as a whole by developing methods of modifying behaviour. In addition, learners should explore **five** controversies that continue to pose challenges for psychology. These controversies can be considered synoptically and draw on the content from the whole of the specification.

Applications

Learners must choose to study **three** from six nominated behaviours. For each behaviour it will be necessary for learners to:

- know the characteristics of the behaviour
- know and understand biological, individual differences and social psychological explanations of the behaviours
- evaluate the biological, individual differences and social psychological explanations of the behaviours
- know and understand the methods of modifying the behaviours
- apply the explanations to methods of modifying the behaviours
- evaluate the methods of modifying the behaviours (including their effectiveness, ethical implications and social implications).

Controversies

For each of the five controversies it will be necessary for learners to:

- understand the issue and why it is controversial
- apply knowledge and understanding to controversies in psychology
- make judgements and come to conclusions about the controversies from a psychological perspective.

Component 3: Content to be taught

	Biological explanations (at least two)	Individual differences explanations (at least two)	Social Psychological Explanations (at least two)	Methods of modifying this behaviour (at least two)
Addictive behaviours	For example - addiction genes - disease of the brain - dopamine	For example - cognitive biases - field dependence - Lang's addictive personality traits	For example - co-morbidity with mental illness - peer pressure - role of the media	Including - agonist and antagonist substitution - aversion therapy
Autistic spectrum behaviours	For example - amygdala dysfunction - chloride ions at birth - genetic predisposition	For example - gender differences - theory of mind - weak central coherence theory	For example - male behaviour - empathising-systemising theory - refrigerator mother	Including - Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) - Relationship Development Intervention
Bullying behaviours	For example - bullying genes - evolved gender differences - hormones	For example - cognitive biases - narcissistic personality - theory of mind	For example - cultural differences - in-group / out-group - moral disengagement	Including - Creating A Peaceful School Learning Environment (CAPSLE) - Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme
Criminal behaviours	For example - disinhibition hypothesis - inherited criminality - role of the amygdala	For example - Eysenck's criminal personality - intelligence factors - psychopathic personality	For example - differential association theory - gender socialisation - normalisation theory	Including - anger management - restorative justice
Schizophrenia	For example - cannabis influence on brain chemistry - dopamine hypothesis - enlarged ventricles	For example - thought disorder - schizophrenogenic mother - sex differences	For example - cultural norms - dysfunctional families - expressed emotion	Including - antipsychotic drugs - cognitive behavioral therapy
Stress	For example - adrenaline - evolutionary adaptation - stress genes	For example - hardiness - self-efficacy - type A, type B personalities	For example - daily hassles - life events - locus of control	Including - beta blockers - stress inoculation training

Controversy in psychology	Exploration of the controversy to include
Cultural bias	• cross cultural studies • difference or bias • ethnocentrism • historical and social context
Ethical costs of conducting research	• benefits to society and the economy • individual participants • potentially negative consequences for society • risk management techniques used by Psychologists
Non-human animals	• BPS Guidelines for Psychologists Working with Animals • comparative / ethological psychology • use as a therapeutic device • speciesism
Scientific status	• benefits of being a science to society and the economy • changing nature of 'science' • costs of being a science • methodologies used by the various approaches
Sexism	• gender difference or gender bias • heterosexism • historical and social context • the 'invisibility' of women in psychology

3 ASSESSMENT

3.1 Assessment objectives and weightings

Below are the assessment objectives for this specification. Learners must:

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 a range of scientific information, ideas and evidence, including in relation to issues, to:

- make judgements and reach conclusions
- develop and refine practical design and procedures

The table below shows the weighting of each assessment objective for each component and for the qualification as a whole.

	Weighting	AO1	AO2	AO3
Component 1	33⅓%	13⅓%	6⅔%	13⅓%
Component 2	33⅓%	6⅔%	16⅔%	10%
Component 3	33⅓%	10%	8⅓%	15%
	100%	30%	31⅔%	38⅓%

4 TECHNICAL INFORMATION

4.1 Making entries

This is a linear qualification in which all assessments must be taken at the end of the course. Assessment opportunities will be available in the summer series each year, until the end of the life of this specification. Summer 2017 will be the first assessment opportunity.

A qualification may be taken more than once. Candidates must resit all examination components in the same series.

The entry code appears below.

WJEC Eduqas A level Psychology: A290QS

The current edition of WJEC's *Entry Procedures and Coding Information* gives up-to-date entry procedures.

4.2 Grading, awarding and reporting

A level qualifications are reported as a grade from A* to E. Results not attaining the minimum standard for the award will be reported as U (unclassified).

APPENDIX A

MATHEMATICAL REQUIREMENTS AND EXEMPLIFICATION

Mathematical skills	Exemplification of mathematical skills in the context of A level Psychology (assessment is not limited to the examples given below)
Arithmetic and numerical computation	
Recognise and use expressions in decimal and standard form	Converting data in standard form from a results table into decimal form in order to construct a pie chart
Use ratios, fractions and percentages	Calculating the percentages of cases that fall into different categories in an observation study
Estimate results	Commenting on the spread of scores for a set of data, which would require estimating the range
Handling data	
Use an appropriate number of significant figures	Expressing a correlation coefficient to two or three significant figures
Find arithmetic means	Calculating the means for two conditions using raw data from a class experiment
Construct and interpret frequency tables and diagrams, bar charts and histograms	Selecting and sketching an appropriate form of data display for a given set of data
Understand simple probability	Explaining the difference between the 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance
Understand the principles of sampling as applied to scientific data	Explaining how a random or stratified sample could be obtained from a target population
Understand the terms mean, median and mode	Explaining the differences between the mean, median and mode and selecting which measure of central tendency is most appropriate for a given set of data
Use a scatter diagram to identify a correlation between two variables	Plotting two variables from an investigation on a scatter diagram and identifying the pattern as a positive correlation, a negative correlation or no correlation
Use a statistical test	Calculating a non-parametric test of differences using data from a class experiment
Make order of magnitude calculation	Estimating the mean test score for a large number of participants on the basis of the total overall score
Distinguish between levels of measurement	Stating the level of measurement (nominal, ordinal or interval) that has been used in a study
Know the characteristics of normal and skewed distributions	Being presented with a set of scores from an experiment showing a normal distribution and being asked to indicate the position of the mean (or median, or mode)

Select an appropriate statistical test	Selecting a suitable inferential test for own practical investigation and explaining why the chosen test is appropriate
Use statistical tables to determine significance	Using an extract from statistical tables to say whether or not a given observed value is significant at the 0.05 level of significance for a one-tailed test
Understand measures of dispersion, including standard deviation and range	Explaining why the standard deviation might be a more useful measure of dispersion for a given set of scores e.g. where there is an outlying score
Understand the differences between qualitative and quantitative data	Explaining how a given qualitative measure (for example, an interview transcript) might be converted into quantitative data
Understand the difference between primary and secondary data	Stating whether data collected by a researcher dealing directly with participants is primary or secondary data
Algebra	
Understand and use the symbols: =, <, ≤, ≥, >, α, ≈	Expressing the outcome of an inferential test in the conventional form by stating the level of significance at the 0.05 level or 0.01 level by using symbols appropriately
Substitute numerical values into algebraic equations using appropriate units for physical quantities	Inserting the appropriate values from a given set of data into the formula for a statistical test e.g. inserting the N value (for the number of scores) into the Chi Square formula
Solve simple algebraic equations	Calculating the degrees of freedom for a Chi Square test
Graphs	
Translate information between graphical, numerical and algebraic forms	Using a set of numerical data (a set of scores) to construct a bar graph
Plot two variables from experimental or other data	Drawing a scatter diagram from two sets of data in a correlational investigation

APPENDIX B

Component 2: Personal Investigations

Each year learners will need to carry out two psychological investigations in preparation for Component 2 as indicated below:

Assessment	Investigation one	Investigation two
Summer 2026	A correlation of screen time and sleep.	An experiment on language and music.
Summer 2027	A content analysis of post-match interviews.	An experiment on social facilitation.
Summer 2028	An experiment on chunking and short-term memory.	A questionnaire study on weather and mood.
Summer 2029	An interview on factors that affect sleep.	An experiment on the serial position effect.

The British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) must be adhered to in the implementation of the investigations. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that the work carried out is appropriate for the learners.

Learners can collect data as individuals, pairs or groups within or external to the educational context. It is suggested that a log book is kept which will be a source to support learners' preparation for the assessment.