

## University of Cambridge: Programme Specifications

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this programme specification. At the time of publication, the programme specification has been approved by the relevant teaching Faculty or Department. It is, however, natural for courses to develop and change over time and we reserve the right, without notice, to withdraw, update or amend this programme specification at any time.

### Social and Political Sciences Tripos: Programme Specification

*[Revision Feb 04]*

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|---|---|
| <b>1. Awarding Institution</b>            | The University of Cambridge   |
| <b>2. Teaching Institution</b>            | The University of Cambridge and the Cambridge Colleges  |
| <b>3. Final Award</b>                     | Bachelor of Arts  |
| <b>4. Subject</b>                         | Social and Political Sciences taught over three years in Parts I (1 <sup>st</sup> year), IIA (2 <sup>nd</sup> year) and IIB (3 <sup>rd</sup> year).   |
| <b>5. UCAS Code</b>                       | LL32  |
| <b>6. Typical Offer and Entry Numbers</b> | AAA / AAB, average 'A' level score of 29 points<br>Admission is based on high achievement in 'A' level or equivalent examinations, school recommendations and success in interview. Almost all applicants are interviewed. On average 110-120 students are admitted each year, all of whom are full-time. |
| <b>7. QAA Score</b>                       | 23  |
| <b>8. RAE Score</b>                       | Sociology & Social Psychology 5; Politics 4.  |
| <b>9. Staff</b>                           | The core teaching staff consists of 24 University Teaching Officers. In addition a wide variety of people from the Colleges, as well as some linked to other Faculties, supervise, lecture and assist as Directors of Studies.  |

#### 10. Accommodation and Facilities

Social and Political Sciences (SPS) is currently located on three sites: two adjacent buildings in Free School Lane and on the New Museums Site, and one in the Old Press, 5 minutes' walk away. The Free School Lane building has a lecture hall, seminar and teaching rooms, offices for Sociology and Psychology staff, a postgraduate study and computer room, a laboratory for undertaking psychological experiments and an observation room for psychological research both with full audio-visual facilities. Equipment includes VCRs, data projectors, DVD, CD and audio cassette players. The Old Press site houses Politics and some other institutions in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. It has lecture and seminar

rooms and offices for staff and research students. The Faculty has a well-stocked undergraduate library with approximately 29,000 books, 72 periodicals and 1,200 pamphlets. It has 70 reader spaces, 9 computer terminals and provides access to the university-wide catalogue, e-mail and the World-Wide Web, and various bibliographic databases.

### **11. QAA Benchmarking Group**

Sociology  
Politics and International Relations  
Psychology

### **12. Educational Aims of the Programme**

The Faculty of Social and Political Sciences is the principal institution providing teaching in Sociology, Social and Developmental Psychology and Politics within the University of Cambridge at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It also draws upon the resources of several other Departments and Faculties in the University in order to optimize its teaching programme, including History, Social Anthropology, Oriental Studies, Education, Experimental Psychology and International Studies.

The Tripos consists of a Part I, following which students choose one of four schemes of study through Parts IIA and IIB: Sociology, Social Psychology, Politics, or Sociology and Social Psychology. (Sociology can also be combined with Politics.) The philosophy of this structure is that the first year is multidisciplinary, giving students a basis on which to choose a disciplinary focus in Part II. Part IIA is disciplinary, providing a coherent disciplinary formation. In Part IIB students can continue to focus on their chosen disciplines or can widen their studies from a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary options. In this way the Tripos offers, over a three-year period, disciplinary depth and range, progression in whichever disciplines are chosen as a focus, and the choice in the third year to explore both advanced research-led papers in the core disciplines and advanced options based on the interdisciplinary perspectives at the forefront of much contemporary social scientific research.

#### *The Course Aims:*

#### **Overall**

- to provide an excellent education in, and a critical appreciation of, Sociology, Social and Developmental Psychology and Politics and associated sub-disciplines at the undergraduate level
- to maintain the highest academic standards and to keep open the channels between current research directions and curriculum design
- to provide a stimulating environment in which students can realise their intellectual potential
- to provide, in collaboration with the Colleges, an integrated structure of learning and teaching which can be tailored to the needs of individual students
- to continue to attract outstanding students from varied social backgrounds, and to help them develop a wide range of intellectual abilities, writing, research and critical skills, and other qualities which will enable them to make a significant contribution in their chosen careers and walks of life, including further academic studies

## **In the Tripos Programme**

- to provide an appropriate balance of disciplinary specialisation and depth, and interdisciplinary breadth
- to enable students in each successive year to build on the knowledge and skills acquired in previous years, so as to achieve progression in their studies
- to enable students to acquire skills to write and produce both short and long documents using word-processors and other research and productive tools including internet resources
- for those students following SPS Part II in one year: to provide an education in the social sciences which covers a mixture of subject matter appropriate to each student

## **Social and Political Sciences Tripos: Course Structure and Outcomes**

### **Part I (the 1<sup>st</sup> year)**

In Part I students take four compulsory papers, one each in Politics (The Analysis of Modern Politics, Paper 1), Sociology (The Development of Modern Societies, Paper 2), Social Anthropology (Human Societies: The Comparative Perspective, Paper 3) and Social Psychology (Society, Interaction and the Individual, Paper 4). Each paper gives an introduction to the nature, scope and core themes of the discipline at issue. The course is assessed by four written examination papers.

On completion of Part I students should have acquired:

1. An understanding of a range of arguments about the modern state, about modern democratic practice, and criticisms of and alternatives to this practice;
2. A basic knowledge of classical social theory, of key concepts in sociology and of selected institutions of modern societies;
3. An understanding of key concepts for the analysis of social and developmental psychological processes, together with a basic appreciation of the methods that can be used to research these processes;
4. A basic knowledge of the aims, scope, theory and methods of Social Anthropology as the description, analysis and comparative study of human society and culture;
5. An ability to read and assess a range of standard literatures, to develop their own arguments in response to these literatures, to express these arguments on paper and to defend them in discussion; and
6. A basis on which they can make an informed choice of subjects to be followed in Part II.

## Part IIA (the 2<sup>nd</sup> year)

Part IIA has the discipline-centred objective to impart knowledge at intermediary level of the discipline or disciplines within students' chosen scheme. In Part IIA students therefore take three papers related to the discipline they have chosen as a focus: Politics (Scheme (a)), Social Psychology (known as 'Psychology within the Social Sciences', Scheme (b)), Sociology (Scheme (c)), or Sociology and Social Psychology (Scheme (d)):

- For Politics, this includes a choice from one of two papers on the History of Political Thought, a choice of one of two papers on the analysis of modern politics (comparative or international), and an essay paper on Conceptual Issues in Modern Politics;
- For Social Psychology, a paper on Social Psychology, a paper on Experimental Psychology, and a paper on methodologies;
- For Sociology, a paper on Social Theory, a choice of one paper from Contemporary Societies and Global Transformations or two papers on the analysis of modern politics (comparative or international), and a paper on methodologies;
- For Sociology and Social Psychology, a choice of a paper on Social Theory or Contemporary Societies and Global Transformations, a paper on Social Psychology, and a paper on methodologies.

Research methods have a significant place in IIA teaching in Schemes (b), (c) and (d). All students on these Schemes take a paper, Methods of Inquiry and Analysis, in which they study general methodological issues, topics in the philosophy of the social sciences, and they may study basic descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. (Basic descriptive and inferential statistical techniques is a mandatory component of the methods paper for students on Schemes (b) and (d)). All students on these Schemes also undertake a simple research project (presented in a 5,000-word essay). The project requires them to engage in some type of data collection, alone or in a group, whether from a small fieldwork project or from printed sources, and to analyze the data using quantitative or qualitative methods. The analysis is carried out individually by each student. The paper can be used as a preliminary study for those students who wish to undertake a dissertation in IIB. Students for Scheme (a) are encouraged in IIA to develop their capacities for independent thought and inquiry in two long assessed essays.

On completing Part IIA students should have acquired:

*Overall:* a knowledge at intermediate level of the discipline or disciplines within their chosen scheme.

*For students in Scheme (a):*

1. A close understanding of a range of more specialized texts from a period in the history of political thought, and of issues and arguments in international politics and comparative politics;
2. An ability, in response to general analytical questions, to define and explain the scope of each question, to explore sources, and to develop an argument at length in writing.

*For students in Scheme (b):*

1. A deeper understanding of social psychological theories and findings.
2. A basic understanding of learning, memory and cognition, and practical experience of experimental design and analysis.
3. A training in methodological practices, sufficient to enable them to undertake a simple research project and to use computerized statistical packages.

*For students in Scheme (c):*

1. Knowledge of the major individuals and schools of thought in modern social theory;
2. *Either* a sociological understanding of global social, economic and political transformations, and of the theories and concepts used in explaining them, *or* an understanding of issues and arguments in international politics and comparative politics;
3. An understanding of research methods and design, sufficient to enable them to undertake a simple research project and to assess the use made of data and methods in published research output.

*For students in Scheme (d):*

1. *Either* knowledge of the major individuals and schools of thought in modern social theory, *or* a sociological understanding of global social, economic and political transformations, and of the theories and concepts used in explaining them;
2. A deeper understanding of social psychological theories and findings, and a basic understanding of learning, memory and cognition.
3. A training in methodological practices, including the ability to use computerized statistical packages, sufficient to enable them to undertake a simple research project.

## **Part IIB (the 3<sup>rd</sup> year)**

In Part IIB students take four papers, and they have greater variety of choice. All IIB papers are advanced level and are designed to bring students into close contact with staff research interests. Students may specialize further in their IIA discipline or disciplines, they may take interdisciplinary thematic papers designed for the third year, or they may take one or two IIB paper from a discipline other than their primary Scheme, as specified by the regulations.

In Scheme (a) one of the four papers is an unseen written examination in Conceptual Issues and Texts in Modern Politics. Students taking Scheme (b) must, with supervision, research and write a dissertation or research report as one of their IIB papers. Dissertations are optional in all the other Schemes.

Students changing into SPS to take a one-year Part II take four papers, for which guidelines are available. All combinations are approved on an individual basis by the Faculty Board, taking into account students' previous courses of study.

Third-year SPS students are also able to follow specialised, interdisciplinary, research-led papers such as Biotechnology and Society, The Family, Women, Gender and Society and The Political Economy of Capitalism. There is also the opportunity to take courses offered in other Faculties or by Area Studies Centres. These include: the Sociology of Education, Developmental Psychology, Modern Japan, Latin America, South Asia and Crime and Deviance. SPS papers are themselves available to students in Economics, Social Anthropology, Modern Languages, History, and Medical and Veterinary Sciences and Experimental Psychology.

On completing Part IIB students should have acquired:

*Overall:*

1. An advanced-level knowledge of their IIA discipline or disciplines and, if they wish, knowledge of a subject in a different discipline and/or of an interdisciplinary area of study;
2. If they offer long essays, an ability to develop a question and to answer it at a level of detail and complexity beyond that required for supervision essays;
3. If they choose to offer a dissertation, an ability to define a subject and undertake independent investigation of it, using primary or, where appropriate, secondary data.

*For students in Scheme (a):*

1. An ability to deploy the skills acquired in Parts I and IIA in a close understanding of more complex issues in at least one of the following: political thought (including modern political philosophy), international politics, comparative politics, and the modern politics of a particular region or country;
2. An ability to assess an unseen text in politics or to answer an unprepared general question on a political issue of theoretical and practical interest.

*For students in Scheme (b):*

1. An understanding of the concepts and methods employed in developmental psychology;
2. The methodological and conceptual skills to undertake and report their own research project;
3. A deepened knowledge and understanding of contemporary research on selected topics in social or developmental psychology;
4. A training in psychology to the level required for graduate membership of the British Psychological Society.

*For students in Scheme (c):*

1. Detailed understanding of contemporary research in one or more fields in Sociology;
2. The possibility, if they choose, to acquire a detailed understanding of complex issues in modern Politics;
3. The possibility, if they choose, to acquire a detailed understanding of complex issues in one or more fields of advanced interdisciplinary research.

*For students in Scheme (d):*

1. If they choose, a deepened knowledge and understanding of up-to-date research on selected topics in social or developmental psychology;
2. If they choose, a detailed understanding of recent research in at least one field of specialization in Sociology.
3. If they choose, a detailed understanding of complex issues in one or more fields of advanced interdisciplinary research.
4. If they choose, the methodological and conceptual skills to undertake and report their own research project

## **Teaching**

Teaching is provided by the Faculty in the form of lectures, and, for some papers, classes and seminars, relating to the papers offered in the Tripos; and by the Colleges in the form of supervisions which give students individual and small group teaching related to the papers studied through written work and feedback thereon. Supervisions also require students to develop oral skills of analysis, presentation, argumentation and discussion. For Part I supervision is arranged by College Directors of Studies. For Part II SPS has adopted a system of centralised supervision management whereby the course organiser for each paper undertakes to provide a list of supervisors and to allocate students either to supervisors or into supervision groups with those supervisors. Colleges and Directors of Studies who prefer to organise this teaching are at liberty to do so. Students are encouraged throughout to undertake independent reading and study to back up and consolidate what is being taught.

## **Assessment**

*Continuous assessment and monitoring of students' progress:*

Formative assessment consists principally of supervisors reading students' essays, marking them up with written comments (for which the Faculty has issued guidelines) and discussing them in supervisions. Undergraduates can expect to attend between 8 and 12 supervisions per 8-week term.

*Formal examination procedures:*

Summative assessment takes the following forms: three-hour unseen closed-book examinations, which remain the principal method of examination; 5,000 word essays on subjects chosen from lists of prescribed topics; 10,000-word dissertations on subjects approved by the Faculty Board; and, in Social Psychology and methods papers, experimental and statistical exercises and short research projects. The 5,000 word essays are a compulsory part of Scheme (a) in IIA, and dissertations are compulsory in Scheme (b) in IIB.

Examination is undertaken by independent Boards of Examiners appointed by the University on the advice of the Faculty Board, with externals for each of the three disciplines. All examinations are classed and criteria for classing are published. All scripts and other assessed work are subject to blind, anonymous double-marking, and borderline cases or serious unresolved disagreements among markers are referred to external examiners. Marks awarded by externals in cases of unresolved disagreements between first markers are final. Special arrangements are made for candidates who are unwell or suffer from certain disabilities, such as dyslexia.

Students have access to their examination marks through their Colleges and examiners produce reports on performance in each paper every year. External examiners' general reports and internal examiners' reports are made known to students through their representatives on the Faculty Board.

### **Career Destinations**

SPS offers an unusually diverse range of career openings. Graduates from Scheme (b), Social Psychology, are eligible for admission to professional courses in clinical and educational psychology through graduate membership of the British Psychological Society. The University Careers Service data show that, in recent years, about one-fifth of SPS graduates went on to further study, about 40% went into the private sector, and about 15% into the public sector. Up to a third of graduates in recent years have begun careers in finance, law and business, including consultancy.

### **Quality Management and Enhancement**

The Faculty Board is responsible for monitoring all teaching in the Faculty. The Faculty Board is obliged to show the Education Committee of the University's General Board that it has considered External Examiners' reports and that it has taken action in response to them. The Faculty's Teaching, Learning and Quality Committee, Chaired by the Faculty's Director of Undergraduate Education, allocates lecturers to courses, draws up lecture lists and considers issues of educational policy, which it may bring to the Faculty Board.

The Staff-Student Committee, also Chaired by the Director of Undergraduate Education, reports to the Faculty Board and discusses issues raised by student representatives relating to resources, course provision and teaching. Student representatives also sit on the Faculty Board and the Teaching, Learning and Quality Committee. Student representatives make an important contribution to these Committees by alerting staff to problems and pressing for their solution.

The organization and quality of undergraduate supervision and the coordination between lecture courses and supervision are considered by the Directors of Studies Committee, at which Directors of Studies are able to convey problems experienced by the students for whom they are responsible to the Director of Undergraduate Education, Heads of Departments and the Faculty Board. Feedback from the Faculty to the Directors of Studies also occurs through this Committee.

Questionnaires are used extensively to gain student feedback on teaching. Course organizers for each paper distribute them to undergraduates at the end of the Lent term. The responses are reviewed by the Heads of Departments with the course organizers, and appropriate action is then taken. Currently being piloted are questionnaires addressing the overall content of each Scheme at the end of Part IIA. In addition a final year questionnaire is sent out to departing undergraduates. The findings from the questionnaires are summarized by the Heads of Departments for the Director of Undergraduate Education for quality assurance purposes, and they are reviewed also by the TLQ Committee with any appropriate findings coming to the Faculty Board.



Teaching excellence is encouraged by personnel practices. All new appointees are mentored by a suitably experienced colleague. Regular two-yearly (annual for new appointees) staff appraisals are a useful mechanism through which teaching performance can be monitored, or a course of action for improving performance can be agreed if appropriate.

The Faculty believes that it is successful in achieving its aims and objectives, and that it does so while sustaining a strong commitment to research, in the belief that teaching and research are mutually reinforcing. Students sense the excitement of teaching based on current research, and academics know that teaching is one of the most rewarding ways of communicating their own research to others.