

Programme Specification 2025-26

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES TRIPOS

Awarding body	University of Cambridge
Teaching institution	Faculty of Biology
Accreditation details	British Psychological Society
Name of final award	Bachelor of Arts
Programme title	Psychological and Behavioural Sciences Tripos
UCAS code	C800 BA/PBS
HECoS code(s)	100497 (psychology)
Relevant QAA benchmark statement(s)	Psychology
Qualifications framework level	6 (Honours)
Date specification produced	December 2024

The Psychological and Behavioural Sciences Tripos (PBS) at Cambridge provides the opportunity to study the core areas of psychology within the broader context of various cognate subjects.

Psychology has important connections to many other disciplines in the Biological Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, and has important applications in a number of different areas such as medicine, psychiatry, criminology and social policy. The Psychological and Behavioural Sciences Tripos offers a broad and flexible course covering all aspects of psychology, for example: perception, cognition, the development of social behaviour, mental health, language, brain mechanisms, family relationships and influences, personality, and group social behaviour. In the final year, students can pursue the topics that interest them most through engaging with the ongoing research of the Department through project and dissertation work.

Students are taught by lecturers and researchers of international excellence from the Department of Psychology along with colleagues from other parts of the Natural & Social Sciences and the Humanities. Subject societies and seminar programmes also offer regular talks from guest speakers.

In addition to academic expertise, students have access to the Department of Psychology library, which holds print copies of all core texts for the PBS Tripos, along with large range of supplementary resources, including eBooks and periodicals.

The course is accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS), and students who successfully graduate (with at least second class honours, successful completion of the core Part I psychology papers, and a pass mark in their final year empirical research dissertation) achieve the 'graduate basis for chartered membership' which allows them to join the Society and pursue a career in psychology.

Programme structure

Year 1 (Part IA)

In Part IA, students take a total of four papers: the three from Section A, which are compulsory, and one chosen from the list in Section B. Section A papers aim to provide students with the core knowledge required in preparation for second and third year papers, to introduce the skills and understanding required to critically evaluate published research, the understanding of ethical challenges in conducting psychological research and the knowledge and skills involved in conducting psychological research.

Section A

- PBS01: Introduction to Experimental Psychology: From Brain to Cognition (this paper includes practical classes)
- PBS02: Social and Applied Psychology and Individual Differences
- PBS03: From Subjective Questions to Objective Science (this paper includes practical classes)

PBS01 and PBS02 are offered as option papers to students in other Triposes.

Section B

The list of papers available may vary from year to year but will typically include papers in:

- Archaeology
- Biological Anthropology
- Evolution and Behaviour
- History and Philosophy of Science
- Mathematical Biology
- Philosophy
- Sociology

A list of Optional papers for each part of the Tripos will be published in the preceding Easter term.

The assessments for PBS01, PBS02 and PBS03 will be offered in formats prescribed under the Ordinance for Assessment Formats. The Section B option papers will be assessed as per the examination requirements of the parent department.

Year 2 (Part IB)

In Part IB students also take four papers, two from Section A and two from Section B. This year allows students to deepen their understanding of the key areas of psychological research introduced in Part IA. Additionally, students have the opportunity to broaden their knowledge of human behaviour by taking papers in related disciplines.

Section A

- PBS04: Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience (this paper includes practical classes)
- PBS05: Developmental Psychology

PBS04 is offered as an option paper to students in other Triposes.

Section B

The list of papers available may vary from year to year but will typically include papers in:

- Biological Anthropology
- Criminology
- Education
- History and Philosophy of Science
- Neurobiology
- Philosophy
- Sociology

A list of Optional papers for each part of the Tripos will be published in the preceding Easter term.

The assessments for PBS04 and PBS05 will be offered in formats prescribed under the Ordinance for Assessment Formats. The Section B option papers will be assessed as per the examination requirements of the parent department.

Transfer would usually take place in the second year if students have taken at least one PBS option paper in IA. Transferring students would then take four PBS papers in total in their second year - the two compulsory PBS Part IA papers they have not yet taken and the two compulsory PBS Part IB papers, before proceeding to the third year. Students wishing to transfer to PBS will need to consult their Colleges and the department, and in some cases undertake a short assessment.

Year 3 (Part II)

In the final year, students undertake a research dissertation of 7,000 words on a psychology topic of their choice. They also take three further papers. One paper must be chosen from a list of psychology papers. The remaining two papers may be chosen from any of the remaining psychology papers and/or option papers.

The list of psychology papers may vary from year to year but will typically include papers in:

- Advanced Topics in Developmental Psychology
- Advanced Topics in Social and Applied Psychology
- Cognitive and Experimental Psychology
- Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience

The list of other option papers available from other departments may vary from year to year but will typically include papers in:

- Biological Anthropology
- History and Philosophy of Science
- Philosophy
- Sociology

A list of Optional papers for each part of the Tripos will be published in the preceding Easter term.

The assessments for psychology papers will be offered in formats prescribed under the Ordinance for Assessment Formats. The option papers from other departments will be assessed as per the examination requirements of the parent department.

Learning outcomes

The institutions responsible for each paper option within the Tripos will have identified aims, learning outcomes, teaching and assessment methods.

The course aims to:

- provide an education in psychological and behavioural sciences of the highest calibre in order to produce graduates of the quality sought by industry, the professions, and the public service, and to provide academic teachers and researchers for the future;

- provide students with knowledge and skills in social, developmental, biological and experimental psychology within the broader context of the behavioural sciences appropriate to future professional work;
- encourage students to develop a critical approach to their studies, evaluating theory and evidence accordingly;
- allow students to develop specialised knowledge and research skills in one or more subjects, by studying these in depth if they so choose, equipping them with skills to communicate effectively in written and numerical forms;
- produce graduates who can think independently and are capable of applying their knowledge and skills effectively and with integrity;
- provide an intellectually stimulating environment in which students have the opportunity to fulfil their potential;
- provide a course which is attractive to outstanding students from all backgrounds;
- provide full coverage of all material to meet the standards of the British Psychological Society as providing the Graduate Basis for Chartered membership of the society for a student who completes the Tripos with at least second class honours.

Teaching methods

Each course employs a variety of teaching and learning methods, including lectures, classes, seminars, and supervisions. Some papers include practical classes.

Assessment methods

The individual courses employ a range of assessment techniques in formats prescribed under the Ordinance for Assessment Formats. Examiners are appointed separately for each course. In each year of the course, examiners award marks and classes based on marking criteria approved by the relevant course organisers and Faculty Board.

The marks for each course are moderated to ensure a fair and comparable distribution of marks is achieved across each subject. Students are awarded a class based on the aggregate mark of the subjects taken.

Entry and/or progression requirements

Typical offers from Colleges would be three GCE A2-levels, including one in Mathematics or Biology, at grade A*A*/IB 41–42 points, with 776 at Higher Level. Some Colleges have specific entry requirements and applicants should check the relevant College website for details.

Student support

All students are members of a College as well as the Department and have access to learning support from both College and University. Each part of the course is overseen by a course organiser who takes overall responsibility for the running of the course and, in conjunction with college Directors of Studies, gives advice to students on planning the year's work. Students can typically expect two lectures a week for each paper. Students typically write 4-6 supervision essays per paper each year, although the supervision schedule may vary across disciplines.

Students can normally expect regular informal contact, and up to 16 formal hours of supervision for their Part II Research Dissertation.

Graduate employability and career destinations

This course equips students with skills and knowledge of value in numerous professional sectors. Many students pursue further study and research, and graduates are eligible for admission to professional courses in clinical, educational, forensic, or applied psychology. Numerous past students of psychology at Cambridge have gone on to prominent positions in

psychology and related fields throughout the world. Other recent graduates have entered careers in the media, management, the Civil Service, finance, law and business.

The Careers Service maintains links with relevant employers and takes into account employer needs and opinions in the services which it provides for students. The Careers Service also allocates a Careers Adviser to each College, faculty and department to act as a point of contact.

Preparation for employment is provided in the opportunities for acquisition of relevant skills.

Management of teaching quality and standards

- 1 The institutions that contribute to this course participate in the University's quality assurance and enhancement system. Approval by the General Board's Education Committee is required before any significant changes to courses are made. All Learning and Teaching activities, included in this course, are subject to review by the University's General Board. A Learning and Teaching Review of Psychology teaching took place in February 2019.
- 2 Students will be invited to comment on the course both formally and informally. Questionnaires are circulated at the end of each term. Anonymous responses are collated and discussed at Departmental meetings and forwarded to the PBS Management Committee for analysis and action as necessary. Student representatives nominated for each course represent the interests of students on the PBS Management Committee and the Department of Psychology Staff/Student Committee.
- 3 The PBS degree is accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS), such that our graduates are eligible to become BPS chartered psychologists. This accreditation was successfully renewed in 2019.

Quality indicators

The Department of Psychology is celebrated for its teaching; students are taught by researchers of international excellence and many of its past students have gone on to prominent positions in psychology and related fields throughout the world.

In the 2021 Research Excellent Framework, Cambridge was ranked fifth in the country for Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this programme specification. At the time of publication, the programme specification has been approved by the relevant Faculty Board (or equivalent). Programme specifications are reviewed annually, however, during the course of the academic year, any approved changes to the programme will be communicated to enrolled students through email notification or publication in the *Reporter*. The relevant faculty or department will endeavour to update the programme specification accordingly, and prior to the start of the next academic year.

Further information about specifications and an archive of programme specifications for all awards of the University is available online at: <https://www.camdata.admin.cam.ac.uk/>