

OCR A Level Psychology

– an addictive approach to Core Studies



Farnborough Sixth Form College has been teaching OCR A Level Psychology for more than seven years. Currently with around 550 candidates at AS, and 450 at A2, this is an extremely popular Psychology department.

Curriculum Manager Rebecca Rhodes has seen interest in the subject rise steadily over the years. *“When I started here four years ago, we had 23 Psychology classes – now there are 27. I can see this growing even further. Every year, when we talk to prospective students about the courses we offer, there seems to be more and more enthusiasm.”*

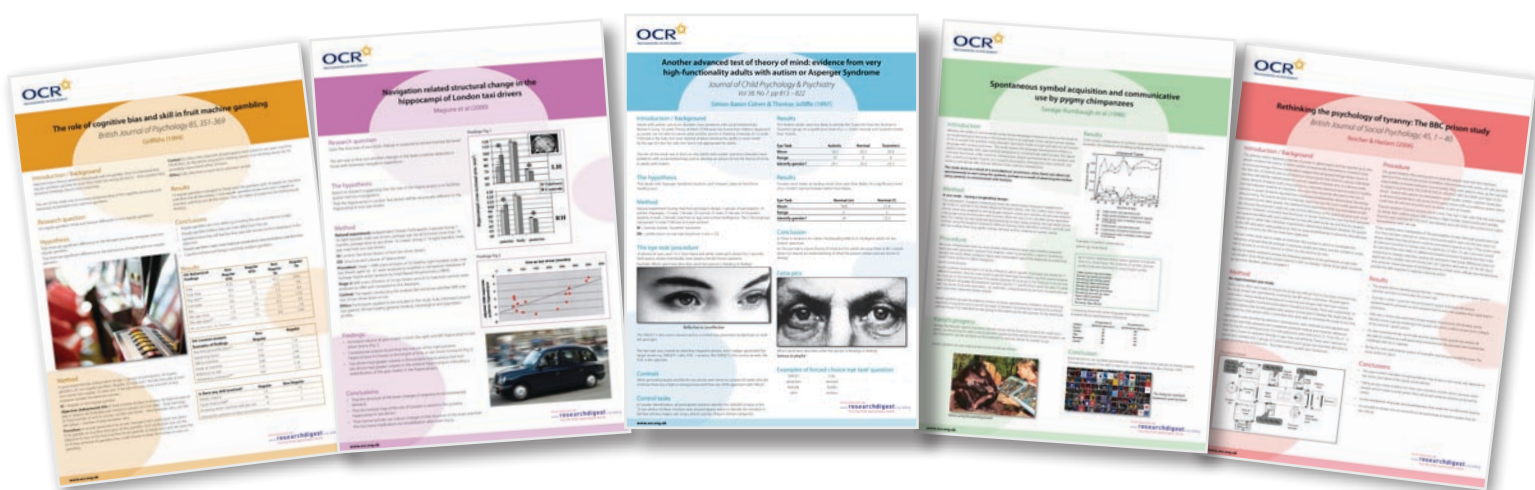
The fact that Psychology is a new subject to most sixth formers is one obvious reason for its popularity, but Rebecca believes there are unique features of the OCR specification that make it particularly attractive. *“The OCR A Level is really versatile,”* she explains. *“It suits the broad range of students we have here, appealing to a variety of learning styles. The Core Studies unit is an important part of this – it keeps the course moving, study-by-study, maintaining enthusiasm and ensuring the subject stays fresh for everyone. I think this is largely why our student numbers keep growing.”*

“Before we took on OCR, we didn’t feel we were getting the best from the qualification that was being used at the time. Then in 2000, some new staff, who’d worked with OCR before, joined the department. They suggested the move, and we haven’t looked back since.”

Favourite topics

In the current specification, Rebecca’s students particularly enjoy the Social Psychology studies. *“We always start off with the topical ones, such as Milgram and Zimbardo. Our students are asked to consider how they would react if they were asked to give an electric shock to an innocent person or how they would behave if they were given the role of guard or prisoner. Then we move on to Developmental Psychology. Freud gets them talking – they either love or hate him! And Bandura is also popular, as there’s a keen interest in children’s behaviour.”*

“My favourite Core Study to teach is Sperry, because we can really make it fun and engaging with hands-on experiments. Students find it fascinating to learn about different functions of the brain and what each hemisphere does. In fact, there’s very little they don’t like. Some of the more abstract areas can perhaps seem a little dry, but these are only minor aspects of the content – and most of these will be replaced in the new specification.”



Always something new

For Rebecca, and the other 16 teachers in her department, the great attraction of Core Studies is the way there's a new study every week. **"It makes it easy to hold students' interest. For every one of them, something comes up regularly that's really meaningful to them – and this 'bite-size' approach shows them right from the start just how varied Psychology is."**

Consistent structure, diverse teaching methods

Although the content of Core Studies is wide-ranging, Rebecca believes in maintaining a methodical approach to each study. **"We always try to begin with an introduction to the key concepts, then go through the study itself, and finally evaluate how it went. The variety of subject matter comes through strongly week-by-week, and we enhance this by using a range of stimuli – such as videos of experiments, which are great for provoking discussion."**

"We also use interactive technology, such as Smartboards, to make the work as engaging as possible. And we encourage web research – which OCR supports, with its links with the British Psychological Society."

The new-look Core Studies

The more manageable content of the new OCR specification brings a number of benefits. Most importantly, it gives teachers like Rebecca more time on each of the Core Studies. **"We can now look at each study within its psychological context more thoroughly, touching on aspects in more detail, such as behaviourism or the psycho-dynamic perspective. So students will gain a broader understanding of where everything fits in."**

There are five new Core Studies in the upcoming specification. And which one is Rebecca most looking forward to teaching? **"The new Baron-Cohen will be more exciting than the last one, dealing with the interpretation of people's emotions through their eyes. Reicher and Haslam should be good too. Based on a major BBC prison study, his work is very recent and topical. Students will also enjoy the relevance of Griffiths, as he covers issues around gambling addiction."**

Choosing OCR again

"We discussed all the options at length," says Rebecca, "but we agreed the new OCR A Level is still the best for our students. The variety of content gives everyone the chance to excel, yet it's still a challenging course, demanding very high standards. We're really happy with it, and our students will love it."

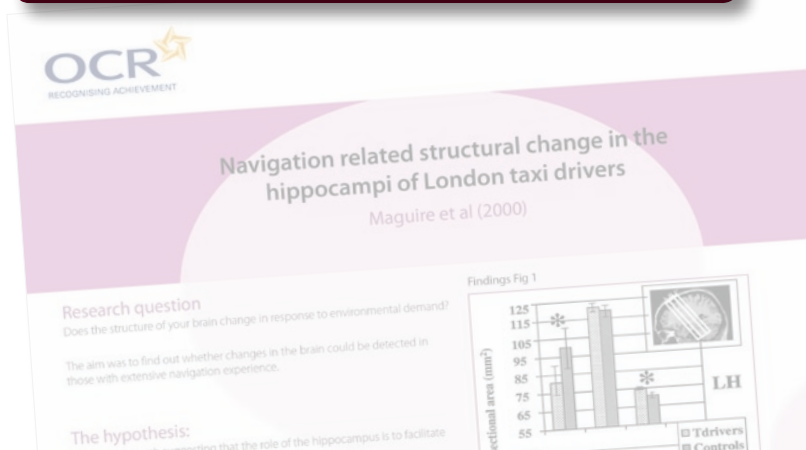
"OCR also wins in terms of the support it offers, the information we've received about the new specification is very clear. The 'What has changed?' document is particularly useful, with a handy table to show very quickly what's different about the new A Level." – You can find the 'What has changed' document on our website or by clicking [HERE](#)

Looking ahead

When the College begins teaching the new OCR A Level Psychology, Rebecca hopes to see the subject's popularity increase even further. **"We already enjoy a 96% retention rate at AS – which with around 550 students is pretty impressive. I'd like to push that rate up even higher. And of course, the more students who want to join us, the merrier!"**

Want to find out more?

For more information on OCR A Level Psychology visit www.ocr.org.uk/psychology/newalevel, call **01223 553998** or email general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk



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