

Assessing Undergraduate Applicants for Offers

University of Bath

Psychology (with placement year)

Psychology with integrated placements at Bath is highly competitive (around 930 applications for 90 places) and because of capacity limits in our computer labs and main lectures spaces we have no capacity to over-recruit.

Offer grades are A*AA in 3 A levels. This can include Mathematics or Further Mathematics but not both. If you are taking a GCE A level in a science subject, you will need to pass any separate science practical endorsement. Candidates who achieve an A or better in EPQ, or a B or better in the Welsh Baccalaureate would be given an alternative offer of AAA in their three A-levels in recognition of the added value of strong project skills. A candidate taking a core mathematics or other Maths qualification (e.g. AS Maths or Further Maths) and achieving a B grade, if they are not taking A-level Mathematics, would also qualify for an alternative offer. Details of our Alternative Offer policy is available at <https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/alternative-offers-for-undergraduate-applicants/>

We prefer applicants with entry qualifications that demonstrate a high level of study in both essay-based and numerical or analytical subjects. For example, if you are studying qualifications with a narrow range of subjects (such as A levels) we prefer both a numerical or analytical subject (like Biology) and a humanities or social science subject (like Sociology). If you are taking a qualification which includes a wider range of subjects (such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma), it is likely you have studied the desired breadth of subjects.

Previous academic study is also important. For example, if you have taken GCSEs we prefer applicants with a strong set (such as grade A*, 8 or 9 in at least five relevant GCSEs or grade A or 7 in the majority of your GCSEs). We strongly prefer applicants who can demonstrate a solid grounding in mathematics (or statistics), such as those with GCSE grade A or 7 in Mathematics. There is a minimum expectation of GCSE Mathematics grade B or 6 plus GCSE English grade B or 6.

Candidates would not usually be interviewed. Candidates are assessed through their UCAS application, with particular emphasis on their personal statement, reference, and achieved and predicted academic qualifications. We are aware that the context in which you are studying can have an impact on your ability to perform your best in exams and coursework, or limit which subjects or qualifications you are able to study at your school or college. We take this into careful consideration through our contextual admissions process.

We look for evidence of a strong interest in Psychology demonstrated by extra-curricular activity, research, wider reading or work experience. Work experience is not compulsory however. Applicants who have personal statements that do not clearly express an interest in Psychology (e.g. applications where the personal statement is about Medicine/ Dentistry) will not be made an offer.

Particular emphasis in the personal statement and reference is given to candidates who show the following qualities - Enthusiasm for Psychology and understanding of what studying the subject at University will involve. Exceptionally fluent writing style and very analytical/thoughtful. Draws upon a significant number of enhancements above their post-16 qualifications (e.g. Additional study that is 'over and above' 3 A levels e.g. MOOC; Awards obtained or challenges completed in a relevant subject; Relevant wider reading; Preparation for Higher Education activities e.g. academic Summer Schools, Realising Opportunities); Relevant work experience, voluntary work, internships (or less

relevant experiences mentioned in a very focused way); Focused discussion of a relevant project qualification e.g. EPQ, Welsh Bacc.

Applications are scored using the criteria set out above (post-16 qualifications, predicted grade and subject mix, GCSE profile, personal statement and reference) with a maximum of 10 marks available. Those scoring 10 can be made an offer before 15 January; all others are held until after 15 January deadline and then ranked and assessed as a gathered field.

Where there is contextual information relating to the candidate's background based on postcode (POLAR data which looks at progression to Higher Education where 1 is the lowest quintile and 5 is the highest; IMD data which looks at socio-economic data where 1 is high level of deprivation and 5 is low level), prior schooling (performance at GCSE and post-16 below the national average) and/or a declared disability this is flagged and the candidate given additional consideration.

Given the popularity of the degrees in the Psychology with placement degree, students who are ranked as "near miss" for a place can be made an alternative offer for the standard Psychology degree without a placement year.

The task

Three of the four examples are at the borderline for consideration for a place, whilst one has scored a 10 in the ranking and automatically secured an offer. One further student received an offer, whilst another received an amended offer for a place on the Psychology without placement degree. One is a candidate who does not get an offer. Please try and identify which candidates received which offers and explain your rationale.

You have fifteen minutes.

Mike Nicholson

Director of Undergraduate Admissions and Outreach

University of Bath

m.nicholson@bath.ac.uk

Candidate A

The subject of psychology has rapidly started to influence the decisions that I am currently making about my future career. Over the last year, I have thoroughly enjoyed my schooling in the subject and have discovered my fascination for particular topics, especially psychopathology as I think that the way in which psychologists are able to diagnose and treat such complex disorders, sometimes without knowing their exact causes, is inspiring. Therefore, I am considering following these interests into a career as a clinical psychologist. This decision has also been influenced by a recent case of mental illness in my close family as even before covering these topics at A-level, I became aware of the various symptoms of mental illnesses and how these were dealt with by psychologists through the use of biological treatments such as anti-depressants as well as psychological treatments such as cognitive behavioural therapy. I am also interested in teaching and gained a valuable week of work experience in an infant school. As well as introducing me to teaching, this week helped to develop my confidence and independence as my responsibilities included running various activities in the classroom with children of different learning abilities such as doing arts and crafts and reading with the pupils. Therefore I am hoping to explore educational psychology as well, perhaps by choosing a related optional module within my degree course.

In my first year of A-levels, I was fortunate enough to be able to attend a psychology conference in London at which psychologists spoke about their research in many different areas of psychology. My favourite of the talks was delivered by Dr Philip Zimbardo who spoke about his very controversial Stanford Prison Experiment. This was especially intriguing as Zimbardo argued that although his research became infamous for the ethical issues it involved, such as causing psychological harm to some of the participants, its observations and findings have become extremely significant in shaping our knowledge of how people conform to social roles. This experience really opened my eyes to the vast amounts of psychological research that is continuously conducted worldwide and so I am excited to find out more about this compelling research at the Psychology Live Conference that I will be attending in Paris.

After learning to kayak with the Girl-Guides I have now become a Paddlesport Activity Assistant, which is a new endorsement recognised by British Canoeing. My role includes; supplying guests with equipment, teaching basic strokes and knowing any potential health and safety concerns. Having a role such as this shows my dedication to not only being part of a team but to developing my own skills and knowledge on the water as this is an important part of the role.

I feel strongly that I would contribute effectively to my university community as I am a friendly and approachable person who has experience in representing my school and college. An achievement that I am most proud of is being awarded the Diana Award for Anti-Bullying through my role as an Anti-Bullying Ambassador. In order to receive this national award I worked as part of a student team for two years to report and deal with bullying incidents within the school as well as create and deliver presentations to younger students on this prominent issue. Being part of a hardworking and committed team such as this was really important in developing my confidence and communication skills. In addition, I have also enjoyed being a student Prefect and Ambassador continuously throughout my schooling and I especially enjoyed any opportunities to be a positive role-model at Open Days or other events which involved meeting new people. Therefore, I would love to continue being a positive representative at University by pursuing similar roles.

Candidate A – Background

The candidate attended a non-selective 11-16 co-educational Academy with specialisms in IT and Technology, with slightly above average GCSE results for their Local Authority and for England. The School's most recent Ofsted inspection was Good. They then proceeded to an academically high-performing Sixth Form College offering A-level and BTEC provision. There had been some disruption in staffing however because of a recent merger. The referee provided a link to a summary statement on the College that provide additional context. About half of the students from the College came from catchments where there were high levels of socio-economic deprivation (IMD quintiles 1 and 2) although the applicant's home postcode indicates they were IMD-5, Polar-5.

A-levels (predicted grades): A*(Psychology), A (History), B (French)

GCSE (achieved grades): 8 (Mathematics), A* (French, History, Science, Additional Science), 7 (English Language), A (Statistics, Child Development), B (English Literature)

The reference particularly emphasises the candidate's suitability for an experimental Psychology degree and discusses their engagement in producing an individual research topic in Psychology that drew on recent research as well as demonstrating strong awareness of biological principles and statistical and analytical skills. Their History tutor emphasises the candidate's engagement with primary source material and capacity to contribute to conceptual discussions. The French teacher indicates that the candidate has engaged fully with the course material and is attentive in class and contributes effectively to group work. Whilst they struggled initially with the workload, they have showed marked improvement in the latter half of the year, responding positively to feedback. All the staff comment on the student's self-motivation, empathy, and capacity to work towards deadlines. The end of year results for Psychology and History indicate that the candidate is performing at the top of the ability range within the cohort.

Candidate B

Psychology's ability to provide us with insights about human functioning on a societal level, as well as on an individual one, is why I am driven to study the subject at a higher level. The speed at which deindividuation occurred in Zimbardo's prison study, and how guard brutality escalated in the space of days is what first fascinated me about Social Psychology. I was so intrigued by the study and the applications it could have to the understanding and functioning of prisons, that I further investigated by watching the film adaptation, reading sections of "The Lucifer Effect", and reading an article titled "Time to change the story". This not only gave me a deeper understanding of the isolation felt by the participants - as the book featured their own thoughts - it also revealed contradictions to the findings. Reading around the study in this way has heightened my understanding of the need for replicable research which further compels me to study and partake in meaningful psychological research.

I participated in the Sutton Trust summer course at the University of X to study Psychological and Behavioural Sciences for a week. I experienced university style lectures from those at the forefront of their fields. It was a fantastic opportunity to learn about the newer findings in psychology, opposed to the more well-established ones taught at A-Level. The lectures on autism and sex differences, and the development of neuroscience were particularly engaging and lead me to complete an online "FutureLearn" course on Biological Psychology from the University of Monash. This provided further detail on gene-environment interactions. It detailed the genetic-environmental correlation, which suggests they have a reciprocal relationship and influence each other bidirectionally which I found to be an interesting addition to the nature vs nurture debate that we have had in class. The course also provided a brief explanation of epigenetics. To further investigate, I have read "The Epigenetics Revolution" by Nessa Carey and found learning about processes such as DNA methylation fascinating. Doing this has increased my appreciation for biological explanations of behaviour as well as environmental ones.

My A-Level choices have prepared me for studying Psychology. Chemistry has provided me with practical skills and the ability to conduct experiments objectively which is essential to Psychology. Maths, and learning about statistics specifically, alongside research methods in Psychology, has increased my analytical ability and appreciation for the use of statistical testing. Studying English Literature for a year prepared me for concise essay writing and improved my evaluation of arguments. Outside of A-Level Psychology, my enthusiasm for the subject is demonstrated by the Psychology Society which I founded within my school. We meet every half term and began by reading "Opening Skinner's Box". After running a stall at the Freshers' fair, around 30 people have signed up, which I believe shows my passion for sharing and discussing psychological research. Moreover, I partook in creating a video for my local Health partnership in which mental health issues in adolescents were discussed. The aim was to raise awareness within schools and medical professionals about the growing issue of psychological disorders. I particularly enjoyed how this related to my learning in the Psychopathology unit. I have a subscription to "The Psychologist" magazine and after reading an article titled "Yawning at the apocalypse", I decided to start an EPQ on whether psychological factors are to blame for the lack of large scale social action on climate change, a stance I had not considered before.

Psychology has advanced greatly in the last few centuries to become a much more rigorous and scientific discipline. It would be a privilege to study this subject further at a university which is at the frontier of research.

Candidate B – Background

The candidate attended an 11-18 non-selective state funded co-educational senior school with GCSE grades slightly above the local authority and national average, and average attainment in post-sixteen qualifications. The most recent Ofsted rating was Good. The school has strong progression to higher education, and the Sixth Form attracts students from a wide semi-urban catchment area serving a large town, which includes areas of high affluence and well as areas of deprivation, including significant numbers who attended other schools for their GCSEs. Students are encouraged to start four subjects in Year 12, with most taking three through to completion. The school offers a wide range of applied and academic A-levels. The candidate's home postcode indicates that they are Polar Q3, and IMD Q2.

A-levels (predicted grades) – A* (Psychology), A (Chemistry), B (Mathematics), A* (EPQ). The candidate also commenced A-level English Literature, which they ceased to study at the end of Year 12.

GCSE (achieved grades) – 9 (English Language, English Literature), A* (Chemistry, Drama, Physics, Geography, Psychology, French, History, Biology), 8 (Mathematics)

The candidate is identified as being very popular amongst their peers and won a GCSE prize for English Literature.

The Psychology teacher describes them as an enthusiastic, regular contributor who is receptive to feedback, working hard during lessons. They are a regular contributor to class discussions to which they always add value. Homework tasks are always completed on time and are of a very high standard. The candidate is focused, conscientious, diligent and genuinely excited by their studies. The English Literature tutor indicates the candidate is confident and enthusiastic and is a real asset to the class. They bring an intellectual approach to their analysis, writing with a mature academic voice and register and can be relied on to make valuable, regular contributions in class and group discussions. They are a keen reader, and this background knowledge enhances their responses, which are confident and assured. More limited information is provided for Chemistry and Mathematics, both of which suggest that the candidate struggled initially with the course but has responded positively to feedback and are taking an active and positive role in class activity.

The candidate is an active participant in School activities, taking on leadership roles on the Student Council, particularly in the organisation of social events. They mentor a Year 8 student with emotional and behavioural issues as well as acting as a Year 7 Science mentor. They also work as a teaching assistant for a local tutoring firm, providing support for maths and English language.

Candidate C

Since studying Psychology I have become much more aware of it as a science rather than thinking of it merely as a treatment for mental illness. It excited me that it could help explain people's cognitive processes and the apparent rationales behind their behaviours. I also believe Psychology matters because as a social science it has the potential to improve the workings of society as a whole.

One theory that I have enjoyed during my A Levels is Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation. Learning about this interested me as it allowed me to see how the causes of criminal behaviour could be analysed and interpreted. Bowlby's theory, for example, suggested that Affectionless Psychopathy could be caused by maternal deprivation. While the research is outdated, it introduced me to the psychological analysis of criminal behaviours.

Out of the many approaches used to explain behaviour, I find the Biological Approach most scientific. Greenfield's 'The Private Life of the Brain' challenges this approach. The book altered my view on how genetics could explain behavioural characteristics and their role in Psychology in general. Previously, I had seen genetics as a universal explanation for the majority of human decisions and traits. Having read Greenfield's criticism of biological reductionism using a study by Mendel, I became more open to other explanations and now take a more holistic approach in Psychology.

I am interested also in how ideas in Psychology are always changing both in their frequency and scale. A recent change in perspective that I found particularly interesting related to 'Power Posing' originally discussed by Cuddy and countered by Simmons and Simonsohn, before Cuddy responded. I discovered the statistical tests used by both were identical, but the conclusions differed. Cuddy concluded that 'Power Posing' had an effect on behaviour while Simmons and Simonsohn concluded that there was no significant evidence to support this.

I have also enjoyed pursuing my subject interest outside of the classroom. In March I attended a lecture on Social Psychology as part of my participation in the HE+ programme. The lecture helped me to understand Moscovici's minority influence results by introducing me to his follow up study. My knowledge of the bystander effect was also challenged by the lecturer's dismissal of the evidence in the Kitty Genovese case. After the lecture I looked further into the case, finding that much of what I knew about the case originated from unreliable sources. Following this, I started to check factual information and accuracy of sources in other areas of my A Level studies.

After the lecture, I looked through the 'Social Psychological Bulletin' and found a paper by Dolinski on the topic of whether Social Psychology was still a science of behaviour. This led me to designing my own small-scale experiment into conformity and resistance to conformity by observing patterns of movement in a lift. My initial hypothesis was that there would be a significant difference in the rate of conformity when the dissenter was the same sex as the participant. The evidence led me to reject my original hypothesis. I was forced to re-examine the principle that we respond more to those of the same sex as the results demonstrated both sexes were more likely to follow a male dissenter.

Having practiced karate for eight years up to a black belt level requiring lots of physically draining practice, I became interested in the psychology of why we willingly commit to experiences we know to be painful and the BPS website led me to a study by Babel. The research suggested that people

repeat painful experiences as they minimise the severity of the pain six months later. I would like to research this further and investigate any potential implications for sport generally.

Candidate C – Background

The candidate attended an 11-16 state-funded voluntary aided school with GCSE results slightly above the national and local authority average. The latest Ofsted inspection indicated that the School Required Improvement. For post-16 study the candidate moved to their local open access Sixth Form college which serves a wide geographical post-industrial region on the outskirts of a major city. The College was rated Outstanding in the most recent Ofsted inspection. Around 60% of students progress to further study or training, with 12% going to highly selective universities. The candidate's home postcode identifies them as being from IMD quintile 5 and Polar quintile 4.

A-level (predicted) – A* (Psychology, History), A (Mathematics, Geography)

GCSE (achieved) - 9 (English language, Mathematics), A* (Biology, Religious Studies, French, Geography, History, Chemistry), 8 (English Literature), A (Physics)

The reference indicates that the College has a wide and diverse catchment, and explains the process for determining predicted grades, which relies on regular assessments and two sets of exams each year.

The candidate is identified as the most academically-capable student the College has seen for many years. Their Psychology teacher reports that they have a particular interest in structures and processes which affect behaviour and has also enjoyed looking at the effects of maternal deprivation. They can analyse and evaluate theories and studies very effectively and have developed their knowledge and understanding of how to conduct psychological research and analyse data. They have exceptional essay writing skills and demonstrated their ability to summarise large amounts of information successfully, working well both independently and with others. This analytical skill and confidence in writing is echoed by the History teacher. The candidate has worked hard on developing their confidence in interpreting both primary material and historical interpretations to address the specific enquiry. In Mathematics the candidate is both an excellent mathematician and a conscientious student. They grasp new concepts extremely well. Homework tasks throughout the year have been outstanding, averaging over 85% across Pure Maths. They answer high level class questions, explaining their thought processes clearly and can break down challenging questions. The candidate is prepared to seek help if needed, but rarely requires additional support as they usually recognise their own errors and learn from their mistakes.

Candidate D

Psychology attempts to understand both the underlying motivations behind our actions and how the brain's physiology gives us the functionality to carry actions out. I am intrigued by how the scientific tools offered by Psychology enable us to look beneath the surface of people's actions, and deduce the processes behind them.

I am particularly interested in investigating the specific functions that are controlled by different regions of the brain. Having attended a talk by a Specialist Clinical Psychologist working in a neurological rehabilitation unit, I was fascinated to look at brain scans and discuss a range of Case Studies in which patients had sustained localised brain injuries. I learnt about the effects of such injuries on patients' lives and the processes by which rehabilitation attempts to restore quality of life. This inspired me research further into brain injuries. I came across the case study of Phineas Gage, a man who survived having an iron rod propelled into his head. The rod caused severe damage to his frontal cortex, which can be regarded as the 'control panel' of communication. Whilst he was able to live a relatively normal life, the effect of the injury on his personality was clear: he began to use profanities, became stubborn, and showed little respect for those around him. Learning that someone's personality can change so drastically because a specific region of the brain had sustained injury both intrigued and unsettled me. I began to question whether our personality is truly something we cultivate and control or whether it is purely determined by the material structure of the brain.

Having read Harry Harlow's famous study on monkeys, I was surprised to learn that monkeys prefer to seek out 'contact comfort' over food, which led me to question which factors are most critical in the development of attachment. I then discovered Lorenz's study on goslings. Lorenz split a clutch of goose eggs, taking half with him and leaving half with their mother. Whilst I assumed that all the goslings would naturally retain an attachment to the mother, Lorenz found that in fact the goslings attached emotionally to the first moving thing they saw after hatching, Lorenz himself, and followed Lorenz rather than their biological mother. This interested me as it appears to demonstrate that attachment is a complex psychological mechanism, and this finding has led adoption agencies, for example, to attempt to minimise staff turnover and delays in the adoption process, in order to ensure that infants are able to form secure attachments.

While investigating Freud's studies of the unconsciousness mind, I learnt that he often strayed from the typical scientific method of reliance on empirical evidence, for example the unconscious by definition cannot be observed. However I was nonetheless drawn to his theories on dreams, and what they symbolise. For example, he saw women appearing in dreams as balconies to cling on to like the child clings to its mother. His theories have made me curious about the significance of symbolism in dreams, leading me to wonder whether dream analysis continues to have applications in Psychology today.

Beyond my studies, I enjoy sport which helps me to relax and relieve stress. My faith has made me intrigued by the role that religion can play in Psychology, particularly when treating patients from strongly religious backgrounds. I feel that it is important for psychologists to have an insight into the faith commitments of those they would seek to understand and help. I feel that research in this aspect of Psychology is something that I would be keen to explore further at university.

Candidate D – Background

The candidate attended an 11-19 mixed state-funded non-selective community secondary school with a sixth form. GCSE results for the School were slightly below the national and local authority average. The School was rated Good in the last Ofsted inspection.

For sixth form the candidate transferred to a highly competitive and academically strong state-funded 11-19 academy in a neighbouring local authority, rated outstanding by Ofsted. Progression to higher education training is 94%, with 76% proceeding to highly selective universities. Over 50% of pupils are in receipt of pupil premium, and almost 75% of students have English as a second language. The candidate's home postcode indicated they were Polar quintile 3 and IMD quintile 1.

A-levels (predicted) – A* (Psychology, Sociology), A (History)

AS levels (achieved) – A (Politics, Sociology, Psychology), B (History)

GCSE (achieved) – A* (Biology, History), 8 (English Literature), A (Chemistry, Citizenship, Physics, PE), 7 (English Language), 6 (Mathematics)

The reference emphasises the candidate's interest in their chosen degree, and their capacity to synthesise content from sociology and psychology courses and make synoptic links between the course content. Their capacity to undertake evaluative work is particularly commented on. In history the candidate reads around the subject and has produced work of a consistently high standard, which demonstrates their awareness of bias and objectivity of source material. The candidate is particularly mindful of societal diversity and the impact of race and ethnicity on treatment of mental health conditions.