

## The value of Psychology A-level

Naomi Fisher rightly castigates the government for championing a single model of learning in schools which discourages critical thinking about the curriculum (May issue). I argue, in addition, that we, as teachers of Psychology, provide an important counterbalance to this model that Fisher argues values 'the culture of (dead) white males over any other'. The very nature of our subject lends itself to this.

When called to interview for a Head of Psychology post a few years ago, I was asked to prepare a lesson on epistemology, to lead a debate on the question, 'How do we know that what we know, is right?' This was designed to test the candidates' cognitive flexibility and critical thinking, as these qualities were particularly valued in the school. My contribution to the lesson was to argue various points from a psychological perspective and to manage the dynamic of the students' differing arguments. Since that interview, I have found myself introducing more and more questions into my teaching of Psychology, designed to foster precisely the critical thinking which Fisher laments as so lacking in the government's approach to learning.

Psychology has too often been the butt of colleagues' jokes or dismissed as a 'soft' subject. I have lost count of the number of new acquaintances who, on hearing that I am a teacher and researcher in Psychology, immediately ask 'Are you going to be analysing everything I say?' Despite bold attempts to defend the status of Psychology A-level, the Russell Group did not include it in its list of 'facilitating' subjects, destroying the confidence of students and parents alike in choosing it for sixth form study. Moves such as this, by those in the academic community who should know better, simply perpetuate the misunderstanding that surrounds the subject. In

my experience, many of those who take pleasure in portraying Psychology as inferior to the pure sciences have never actually studied it. My retort has generally been to point out that pure science has told us everything we can know about the carcinogenic properties of cigarettes, but it takes Psychology to tackle the more difficult question of how to change attitudes toward smoking.

What other A-level subject requires that blend of scientific and non-scientific skills? What other subject requires the student to understand the intricacies of advanced statistical analysis and produce an extended piece of evaluative writing on the philosophical underpinnings of major paradigms? Critical thinking and evaluative analysis are at the heart of the subject. Far from only studying the work of (dead) white males, the A-level and IB specifications ensure students identify sources of gender and/or cultural bias and understand how it impacts what we accept as valid theories and arguments.

Instead of adopting the government's 'one size fits all' mentality, teachers of Psychology are well versed in the Piagetian principles of 'discovery learning' and Gopnik's 'child as scientist' approach. We are fully aware that students learn best when they question accepted wisdom and solve problems for themselves. The A-level and IB specifications have been designed to foster precisely this high level of thinking.

Why should Psychology have to constantly defend itself against being seen as a 'soft' subject? This is a myth which we should fight harder to dispel.

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## 'The metrics are clearly weaponised against psychology'

Luna Centifanti, Andrea Flood, Beth Greenhill and Laura Golding on the situation at the University of Liverpool.

'Given that all psychology colleagues continue to be listed for redundancy, the metrics are clearly weaponised against psychology. ...

The threatened redundancies have serious implications for undergraduate and postgraduate psychology programmes in the Faculty. The reduction in staff on the undergraduate psychology programme will mean that minimum staff-student ratios will not be met which in turn risks losing BPS accreditation. In addition, at a time when Health Education England is funding an increased number of clinical psychology

training places nationally to meet the growing need for the clinical psychology workforce within the NHS, the University of Liverpool has declined the offer of additional places for September 2021 in the context of these threatened redundancies. Contrary to the goals to tackle health inequalities with Project Shape, the university will be training fewer clinical psychologists and failing the local health economy. Fewer service users and carers will get the psychological support they need.

In the market-driven context of Higher Education as it currently exists, other

universities will be urgently considering how to mitigate against the loss of income associated with Covid-19. The experiences of both the University of Liverpool Department of Psychology and Doctorate in Clinical Psychology programmes suggests that psychological research and training is particularly vulnerable...

Find their full piece at [thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/metrics-are-clearly-weaponised-against-psychology](https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/metrics-are-clearly-weaponised-against-psychology)