



**General Certificate of Education**

**Psychology 1181**

*Specification A*

**Unit 2 (PSYA2) Biological Psychology,  
Social Psychology and Individual  
Differences**

**Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination - January series*

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## **Unit 2: (PSYA2) Biological Psychology, Social Psychology and Individual Differences**

### ***General***

Although the following advice was given in the previous reports, it seems worthwhile to repeat it again. It is possible that some centres did not have access to the information last year.

A QCA directive was to make the AS exams much less predictable and to move away from the formulaic structure of questions with set number of marks in a conventional format. This means that candidates now need to give themselves much more time to think about the specific requirements of each question. A skill that they now need to show is their ability to select the appropriate information and to apply their knowledge. The new exam has been designed to allow time for this very important skill. Candidates who think about which part of the specification is relevant, who apply their knowledge appropriately and who can write accurate and concise answers, will do very well. Often, time spent thinking and planning is extremely beneficial; sometimes when it comes to writing “less is more”.

Now that candidates write their answers in the booklet, they should be guided by the space provided. Candidates (and teachers) should be reassured that it is perfectly possible to gain full marks in the space provided, often without the need to use the extra space. So if only three or four lines have been given, then this is all that would be expected for the allocated marks; an accurate and concise answer can gain just as many marks as one that uses the extra space but is less focused. It is possible that many candidates who are writing too much probably do not read the question carefully. It is clear that some very well informed candidates are not gaining full marks because they are simply not doing what the question asks.

Teachers might also like to explain to their students the process of scanning and clipping. Examiners do not see whole scripts, but only the clipped part of the question they are marking. Examiners will not see anything that is written outside of the lines or margins, and therefore the clipped area, and so candidates who write outside these areas risk not gaining marks.

### ***Section A: Biological Psychology***

#### ***Question 1***

The main pitfall here was for the candidates who wrote about SAM and not the HPA and therefore gained no credit. Those candidates who correctly wrote about the HPA, usually produced very detailed and accurate answers.

#### ***Question 2***

In general the answers to this question were good, with many candidates understanding the link between stress and the immune system. They were able to offer relevant research (Kiecolt-Glaser, Holmes & Rahe etc) and demonstrate detailed knowledge of the underlying biological processes. However, candidates were not very good at the application requirement of the question and this prevented them from gaining full marks. Candidates need to engage with the stem and give a sustained link; simply describing a study will not suffice.

### **Question 3**

Most candidates offered accurate and detailed answers for part (a) and could provide an accurate outline of the weakness of using correlations. They were rarely able to give a strength, instead giving a definition.

### **Question 4**

Candidates were good at describing personality factors (Type A/B, Hardy Personality, etc) but were much less successful at linking these factors to stress. It was as if they missed the part of the question that asked for the way people respond to stress. Better candidates understood the direction of the effect that personality type can have on stress and were able to support it with relevant research. Some candidates confused personality factors with coping styles, which was not creditworthy.

### **Question 5**

The key aspect of this question was the advice that was needed and many candidates simply ignored this. Lots of research was described that linked stress and the workplace, but candidates failed to engage with the stem. This meant that many failed to gain full marks. Some simply gave detailed and lengthy descriptions of a relevant study, but without shaping it to the specific requirements of the question. Some of the advice was very general and anecdotal, with little or no underpinning with psychological research.

## **Section B: Social Psychology**

### **Question 6**

Candidates showed good knowledge and many were able to gain full marks, although compliance was often better answered than internalisation.

### **Question 7**

This question required candidates to draw conclusions from data, but many could not help going beyond the graph and interpreting the findings in terms of conformity research (Asch, NSI, ISI etc). The question did not require an explanation, but only what the chart showed. Many candidates did not gain many marks because they adopted the wrong approach. Part (b) was answered well.

### **Question 8**

Overall an excellent response to this question, with many candidates finding it easy to identify the locus of control accurately and offering obedience as an explanation for George's behaviour. In Part (b) they could identify Dan correctly and many candidates adopted the route whereby they compared the three students, showing a good understanding of social influence. Some of the better answers also made use of their knowledge of gender differences.

### **Question 9**

This question was, in general, answered very badly, which was disappointing given that it has been asked before. Many candidates failed to gain any marks and it was clear that they were not prepared for this question; they just used it as an opportunity to describe studies on obedience and conformity, with absolutely no link at all with social change. However, very occasionally there were some excellent answers that included factors in minority influence, snowball effect, social crypto-amnesia, social heroism, etc and all linked to relevant examples of social change.

### **Question 10**

Students seemed very well prepared for this question and there were some extremely detailed and well-written essays. The main problem for many candidates was that they provided only a brief statement identifying the definition, which resulted in low AO1 marks. The other pitfall was for those candidates who confused definitions with models and gained no credit.

A recommendation for candidates is that they try and illustrate their definitions with examples from psychopathology. Many of the examples used were sometimes little better than commonsense examples; using more psychologically relevant examples would add depth to an answer.

### **Question 11**

It appeared as if many candidates did not read the question carefully and realise that it required two psychological approaches. Some candidates gave the biological approach, as one of their answers and this gained no credit. Other candidates wrote about different features of the same approach, which resulted in their gaining only half marks. The most successful approaches were the behavioural and cognitive and when done well they could be effectively summarised for three marks. The psychodynamic approach was more difficult to outline as it has so many key features and candidates often missed gaining the full marks because they did not include enough detail. For all the approaches, some link with psychopathology was required for full marks.

### **Question 12**

While the majority of candidates were able to describe systematic desensitisation, they often omitted the relaxation aspect of the therapy and they were poor at applying the therapy to Hamish and his particular phobia. Relatively few candidates gave sufficient detail of the hierarchy, as it would apply to Hamish.

This again suggests that the area candidates find most difficult is the application of knowledge.

## **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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