



**General Certificate of Education**

**Psychology 1186**

*Specification B*

**Unit 2 (PSYB2) Social and Cognitive  
Psychology**

**Report on the Examination**

*2009 examination - June series*

**This Report on the Examination uses the [new numbering system](#)**

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## **Unit 2: (PSYB2) Social Psychology, Cognitive Psychology and Individual Differences**

### ***General***

Candidates coped well with the new style of the examination and the majority were able to follow the requirements of the rubric appropriately. Fortunately, very few candidates attempted to answer all six questions. As was seen in the January entry for this unit, there were still some candidates who had difficulties in pacing themselves through the examination. It was clear they did not allocate their time equitably between the questions. Similarly, there were others who did not pay attention to the number of marks available for questions. This was especially the case in the topic of Social Influence where answers were often more than a side of general description of the chosen obedience study, (usually Milgram.) It was noticeable that some candidates produced extremely lengthy descriptions of studies which were worth a maximum of 4 marks, but for the extended writing questions, worth 10 marks, they could manage less than half a page of writing. It is imperative that candidates do allocate their time appropriately when answering questions.

Overall, candidates' performances on the paper were comparable with the standards seen in previous sessions for both PYB2 and PSYB2. In particular, responses to the short answer sections were often very good. However, descriptions of studies were often quite poor and not always accurate, including invented details of procedure or results.

As in the January series, candidates did not always address the questions set and attempted to display their knowledge about the topic area instead of focusing on the requirements of the task. Even when the information could have been made relevant, there were some instances where candidates attempted to produce what appeared to be model answers rather than focusing their knowledge and its application to the specific question.

The most popular topics were Social Influence, and Remembering and Forgetting, with Anxiety Disorders and Autism being chosen more equally.

Candidates are reminded that quality of written communication is assessed in this unit and that vague, inaccurate or ambiguous expression can limit the marks awarded in each question. In addition, there were some appalling spelling errors, especially of specialist terminology. In some cases it was not always possible to understand what was written and it did seem as though candidates had only ever heard psychological terms and never seen them used in text.

On the whole candidates were able to deal with the inclusion of the questions relating to the experimental method quite well. Most seemed to understand the descriptions of the studies in the topics of Anxiety Disorders and Autism, but they did find the requirement to identify the independent and dependent variables rather difficult. In particular, many candidates struggled with the questions about extraneous and confounding variables.

It was still the case that responses to the last question in a topic were slightly formulaic with regard to AO2 marks. Candidates are reminded that credit is awarded for explanation or discussion of evaluative points rather than listing possible points. Some responses were limited to a series of unexpanded comments relating to ecological validity, ethical and methodological issues. While these can be valid points they must be developed and applied to the particular topic, research or researcher under discussion.

Once again, a majority of candidates failed to fill in the numbers of the questions they had attempted at the front of the answer booklet.

### **Section A Social Psychology**

#### **Topic: Social Influence**

- 01** This part of the question was generally answered well although a significant number of candidates incorrectly chose D as one of their two responses.
- 02** Some descriptions were very confused. Candidates found it difficult to explain why the effects they suggested might occur. There was a lack of understanding about *dominant responses*. Candidates did not seem to realise that the response that occurs when arousal is high **is** the dominant response. The key issue is whether that response is required or suitable for the situation. This would be the case in a simple or well - practiced task and would facilitate performance. The opposite effect of inhibition would be expected if the dominant response was not appropriate for the situation. Some candidates discussed *increased* and *decreased* performance rather than improved or impaired performance.
- 03** Many candidates chose to describe the Milgram study. Some descriptions were very lengthy but accurate, others were less accurate. In method sections, candidates often resorted to 'they' when describing the role of all the people involved and it became quite difficult to understand the report of the procedure.
- 04** Many candidates produced very comprehensive descriptions of the original Asch research, although again there was a lack of accuracy in the descriptions. The task was referred to as having the following features: *ambiguous, concerned with identifying the longest/shortest line, one in which all stooges always gave the wrong answer and participants always conformed*. Some candidates did not discuss the effects on conformity of the factors investigated in the variations of the studies. Evaluation was often dominated by discussion of ethics although there was some reference to normative conformity and compliance. It was expected that candidates would refer to methodological issues and the impact of the research on the work of others and how our understanding of conforming behaviour has been influenced by this information. There were many generic attempts at evaluation such as – lack of ecological validity – but these were often not creditworthy, especially when candidates also stated that the studies were 'good' because they were scientific and replicable. Similarly, references to ethical problems often did not then go on to discuss the reasons for deception and likely issues of demand characteristics. All these points could result in excellent AO2 marks if they included more expansion of the discussion.

#### **Topic: Social Cognition**

- 06** This was generally well answered.
- 07** Some answers only identified the correct bias, but failed to expand this fully. However, many candidates were able to score well on this question.
- 08** Many candidates chose to describe the Asch study. Candidates found it difficult to go beyond the stem for the aim and rarely referred to *order of information*. Method sections often included reference to a list of *words* rather than *characteristics/traits*. The results and conclusion often made no reference to the *impression of a person* and just stated

that the scores were *higher* in a particular condition and sometimes were reported as: *they remembered more words*.

- 09 This was generally well answered. Candidates were less successful when they chose to discuss stereotyping as one of their explanations of prejudice. The Authoritarian Personality was often described quite well, but not evaluated to quite the same depth as the description.

### **Section B: Cognitive Psychology**

#### **Topic: Remembering and Forgetting**

- 10 This was well answered. The major failing occurred when candidates did not make the difference explicit by reference to both STM and LTM.
- 11 This was well answered.
- 12 Many candidates failed to point out that procedural memory relates to memory for motor skills. There were also many references to *unconscious* memory.
- 13 The vast majority scored all 3 marks, although some confused levels of processing with working memory components.
- 14 Retrieval failure was often reported well. Interference theory was more confused with frequent references to distraction and the inclusion of trigram studies where the description only related to decay rather than interference.

#### **Topic: Perceptual Processes**

- 15 Candidates seemed to understand that monocular relates to one eye and binocular to two eyes, but they found it difficult to express their answers in the correct form. They failed to state that the depth cues either **require** the use of one or two eyes to be picked up from the visual scene. Answers were often in the very odd form of depth cues **using** eyes.
- 16 This was well answered.
- 17 Some candidates had obviously acquired a good understanding of this particular feature of the usefulness of ambiguous figures. Others were only able to describe a figure.
- 18 Explanations of the Muller-Lyer were sometimes muddled, although most candidates scored some marks for reference to a carpentered world. Some did understand the *far corner* and *near edge* explanation and were able to score full marks.
- 19 There were some excellent responses to this question and candidates were able to describe and discuss the influence of both factors on perception. There were some inaccuracies in descriptions of the studies and evaluative points related to the research were often quite simplistic. Some candidates seemed to think that participants were 'starved' rather than asked not to eat for 4 hours.

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**Topic: Individual Differences**

- 21** Candidates found it difficult to express how the behavioural features of phobias are quite different to those of mild fear. Some answers did not refer to mild fears at all.
- 22** The IV was often expressed correctly but the DV less so with candidates referring to *the fear* rather than the measurement that was taken – the rating of fear.
- 23** Candidates did find it difficult to apply the issue of extraneous variables to this particular study. They seemed only to be able to consider very generic ideas such as the darkness of the room. Some candidates did not recognise the fact that systematic desensitisation and flooding are very likely to take different amounts of therapy time. Instead of suggesting that the length of treatment was an EV and should be controlled by ensuring that the treatment was completed for each participant, they suggested that all participants must have the same length of treatment time.
- 24** This was generally well answered.
- 25** There was a large range of marks awarded for this question. Some candidates were able to outline the behavioural explanation for OCD and referred accurately to the processes of classical and operant conditioning as the mechanisms for the disorder. However, many tried to include all they knew about the disorder in their answers and failed to construct a coherent response. There were many accounts of Little Albert and Skinner's experiments but these were not made relevant to OCD. Candidates often found it difficult to map the disorder onto the classical conditioning schedule or reinforcement.

**Topic: Autism**

- 26** This was quite well answered although some candidates did not express the behaviour of joint attention very clearly. Many candidates did not illustrate their answers with an example and some examples were of joint attention rather than a **lack** of joint attention.
- 27** The IV was usually identified appropriately, but the DV not so well with many candidates focusing on whether the pictures were in the right order rather than the measurement of the number of times they were in the correct order.
- 28** Most candidates misunderstood the question and suggested likely extraneous variables. They did not seem to notice that the confounding variable had been described in the stem.
- 29** This was answered well with many candidates able to recognise the related design that was used.
- 30** There were some very pleasing responses to this question in which candidates described the many concordance and other sibling studies well and used the results appropriately. Discussions of the weaknesses of the genetic explanation were sensible and comparisons with other explanations were good. However, at the other end there were some very poor answers that focused on neurological correlates and scanning techniques with no attempt to link this biological explanation with genetics at all.

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

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website: <http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html>