



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2011**

**Psychology B**

**PSYB4**

**(Specification 2185)**

**Unit 4: Approaches, Debates and Methods in  
Psychology**

***Report on the Examination***

---

Further copies of this Report on **the Examination** are available from: [aqa.org.uk](http://aqa.org.uk)

Copyright © 2011 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

**Copyright**

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).  
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

## **Unit 4: (PSYB4) Approaches, Debates and Methods in Psychology**

### ***General***

As in past series, the standard of responses was wide-ranging. However, in this examination a pleasing number of impressive responses were seen across all three sections of the paper. Some centres had clearly prepared their candidates very well, most noticeably 'Section C Methods in Psychology'. It was evident that some centres had provided their candidates with opportunities to carry out practical work. Candidates who did have experience of designing and carrying out research were able to select and apply knowledge to the questions in this section, and in particular question 18, in a meaningful way. Most candidates seemed able to pace themselves through this examination and candidates seemed to spend an equal amount of time on each section. Few candidates responded to both options in an attempt to write what little they knew about everything on the paper. It was pleasing that in general this year candidates do appear to be paying more attention to the quality of written communication, though in some cases answers would have benefited from more attention to punctuation.

As in the past, candidates need to be reminded to read each question carefully. There are still many candidates who fail to adhere to the question requirements resulting in a loss of marks. Examples of these shortcomings are most evident in questions where there are two demands for example question 09 '...outline...and explain...' and those where an extended 'explanation' is required eg questions 01 and 05. Too often these resulted in just an outline. Similarly in the extended writing questions, candidates wrote an answer to a question they had prepared or hoped for rather than the one appearing on the paper. In such cases the task of awarding marks was made very difficult for examiners.

Option A in Section A was more popular than Option B, possibly attracting candidates because of the behaviourist aspect in question 04.

On a final note, centres are advised to remind candidates that PSYB4 assesses their knowledge and understanding of 'Approaches, Debates and Methods in psychology'. Some candidates appear to forget the focus of the question, in particular in the extended writing questions, instead writing about topics in psychology rather than approaches and or debates.

### ***Section A Approaches in Psychology***

#### ***Option A***

##### **Question 01**

Few candidates gained all four marks for several reasons. Many candidates failed to achieve the second mark for each method by not providing a rationale. Others did not appropriately outline the methods eg stating twin studies or adoption studies without further elaboration eg MZ vs DZ or MZ reared together vs MZ reared apart. Answers citing adoption studies often failed to explain that the concordance rates with biological and adoptive parents are compared. Indeed, many answers did not include any comparison group or control condition eg referring only to high concordance rates in MZ twins in general. Some very weak candidates provided biological not genetic explanations eg hormones, PET and MRI scans. High performing candidates were able to refer to studies to support their answers.

### **Question 02**

Most candidates achieved one mark for knowledge and understanding of the humanistic approach. However, fewer candidates were awarded the second mark as their explanation of 'Sue' did not go beyond the stem.

### **Question 03**

The majority of candidates were able to identify a problem, most commonly lack of empirical evidence or vagueness of concepts. Some candidates failed to gain two marks because they were unable to present a coherent answer and instead stated several problems, none of which were expanded.

### **Question 04**

A few strong candidates achieved marks in the top mark band. One major difficulty for candidates was evaluating the applications in relation to features of the approaches. It appears that some candidates had not taken into account that the question was from the Approaches in Psychology section of the exam paper. In the more extreme cases the answers focused heavily on an evaluation of therapies or theoretical applications, including criticisms of the methodology of the studies, with little reference to the approach from which they were derived. As a result some answers read as responses to PSYB3 and not PSYB4. Some candidates focused on generic evaluation points in relation to the two approaches (including the erroneous belief that the cognitive approach ignores the emotional element in any explanation of behaviour) with little or no reference to their applications. Application to topics was much weaker for the cognitive approach than for the behaviourist approach.

## ***Option B***

### **Question 05**

This question appeared to be a good discriminator. Stronger candidates did not have a problem achieving all four marks – often via two or three expanded explanations. Less able candidates failed to explain why Freud's 'investigations' were unscientific and instead focused on Freud's theories in general, providing a number of explanations or one protracted repetitive explanation.

### **Question 06**

Most candidates were able to identify a similarity between Freud and Erikson and were awarded one mark but many did not provide sufficient elaboration for the second mark. Often it was just stated that both presented a stage theory and that these were always in a fixed order or that they agreed on a tripartite theory of personality which included the id, ego and superego. Some candidates elaborated on the differences rather than on the similarities.

This is a good example of a question where candidates should always read the command word very carefully. An 'Outline' question requires a more substantial answer than a question that asks candidates simply to 'State' or 'Identify'.

### **Question 07**

The structure of this question is the same as question 06, yet candidates seemed better able to elaborate on the differences between the theories of Freud and Erikson than on the similarities with far more candidates achieving full marks. Successful answers elaborated on the psychosocial vs psychosexual stages of development and the difference in emphasis on the ego and id between the two theories.

### **Question 08**

This question was generally not well done. The description of the eclectic approach often did not go beyond the stem and the discussion all too often focused on practical or methodological eclecticism rather than on an understanding of behaviour. Many candidates simply outlined the features of different approaches and applied these sequentially to the chosen topics without any consideration of the question ie what a particular approach fails to explain and how this deficit might be better explained in combination with another approach. Generally the weaker answers used the topic as the starting point whereas the more successful answers considered the relevant strengths and weaknesses of the eclectic approach and used the topics to illustrate the point. Some candidates referred to one topic only rather than two as required by the question.

## **Section B *Debates in Psychology***

### **Question 09**

More able candidates had no problem gaining all four marks. Weaker answers lost marks because: although the debate was outlined, there was no identification of which side was which. Determinism was often explained as 'all behaviour is determined' or 'predetermined'. Only superficial or muddled explanations were given for the reason why a belief in the existence of free will conflicts with scientific enquiry.

Many weaker answers provided lengthy descriptions of the different types of determinism but then only a sentence for the second part of the question. A few candidates failed to address it at all.

Candidates should appreciate that if there are four marks to a question and two parts to it, it is reasonable to expect that both parts of the answer will be awarded the same number of marks (in this case, two marks for each part).

### **Question 10**

Candidate responses to this question varied greatly. Better answers made comparisons with the nomothetic approach. Considerable confusion resulted from connections between the idiographic approach and holism, qualitative methods of investigations, case studies, the humanistic approach and client centred therapy. Weaknesses in answers were therefore often due to confusing the idiographic approach with the humanistic approach and the holism-reductionism debate.

Some candidates confused the idiographic approach with the nomothetic approach. The two marks allocated to discussion were often not achieved as the nomothetic approach was described as an alternative without evaluative commentary.

### **Question 11**

Although many candidates showed knowledge of some of the features of the scientific approach they failed to place these in the context of the question and disappointingly produced their pre-prepared answer to the question 'Is psychology a science?' or more subtly 'Whether or not psychology should be considered a science'.

These types of answers systematically laid claim to the reasons why it should be considered so for example 'behaviourists do carry out experiments under controlled conditions'; 'Milgram's work on obedience has shown that it can be replicated and numerous studies have been conducted since' etc. These answers then included lengthy descriptions of the various studies mentioned.

Only the stronger candidates were able to identify the arguments and counter-arguments for why psychology should adopt the scientific approach and generally did well. Lengthy accounts of paradigms were a common feature of weaker answers. There was a common belief amongst some candidates that the scientific approach applies to the biological approach and that therefore any attempts to include environmental factors in explanations of behaviour are non-scientific. In a few cases such thinking touched upon the nature-nurture debate.

## ***Section C Methods in Psychology***

### **Question 12**

The main reason why some candidates did not score full marks in answer to this question is because they failed to write an operational statement for example referring to 'being more exploratory' without saying how this variable was measured ('ratings').

### **Question 13**

Most candidates could easily describe quantitative data. However, describing qualitative data proved more of a problem. The most common reason for candidates losing a mark was because they gave advantages of qualitative data (meaningful, holistic, rich and detailed) rather than saying what qualitative data is. Other candidates lost one mark because only one of the methods (rather than both) had been applied to the study. Very few candidates confused the two types of data.

### **Question 14**

Success in this question seemed to be centre specific. In some centres it was good to see virtually all candidates able to identify the correct statistical test. Most candidates were able to state that the data was ordinal and that a test of difference was required.

### **Question 15**

Few candidates gained both marks and many candidates gained no marks at all in response to this question. The major weaknesses were presenting answers based on the median scores or failing to appreciate that findings that are significant at the 10% level should lead to acceptance of the null hypothesis. Some candidates who recognised that the 10% level was too lenient had difficulty in explaining this.

Higher performing candidates were able to correctly explain that the conventional level of significance used is 0.05 and that therefore the null hypothesis should be accepted.

### **Question 16**

Many candidates achieved both marks, referring to bias and increased inter-rater reliability.

### **Question 17**

Many candidates were able to access full marks here. Frequently cited advantages were comparison of scores, reducing bias and maintaining the focus of the interview. Where candidates only achieved one mark this was often due to outlining one advantage rather than two.

### **Question 18**

There was a range of responses to this question. Very good answers outlined studies that were clearly focused on features of an observational study, correctly referring to category systems, use of record sheets, operationalising behaviors etc, as well as cues from the bullet points. Some candidates either omitted or confused the independent variable and the dependent variable (which all too often was not operationalised). In a substantial number of answers, although examples of extraneous variables were provided, there was no suggestion of how to control any of them. Some candidates wrote needlessly about how the data would be analysed. Other proposals which were not thought through and could not realistically be implemented included the following: suggesting that the design could not be repeated measures to avoid order effects (where the independent variable is the gender of the child); demand characteristics as an extraneous variable (the participants being babies); counselling for babies if traumatized following the observation and the need for babies consent to participate in the study.

The value of carrying out practical activities to enable students to ‘think like a psychologist’ and apply their knowledge of practical activities in answer to questions such as this one cannot be overemphasised. It is clear that where candidates were presented with such opportunities they were able to write confidently and in an informed manner, including relevant detailed procedures which meant that reasonable replication was possible. Candidates deprived of such experiences often resorted to the stem to inform their response for example ‘I would rate each baby on a scale of 1 to 10’ or to a limited procedure and unnecessary detail.

## **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>

**UMS conversion calculator** [www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion)