

**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2012**

**Psychology B**

**PSYB2**

**(Specification 2185)**

**Unit 2: Social Psychology, Cognitive  
Psychology and Individual Differences**

***Report on the Examination***

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

### **General**

Student performance on PSYB2 was broadly in line with that observed in the previous January and June series. There is a sustained improvement in responses to questions assessing *How Science Works*, AO3. In this paper it was noted that the standard was higher than on previous papers, with many students scoring the full six marks for these questions, irrespective of the topic selected (be it *Social Influence* or *Social Cognition*). As was noted in January's Report on the Examination, students appeared much more prepared for these questions than historically, and were clearly benefiting from increased familiarity with the question format, as well as the wealth of exemplar material available.

For many students time management is no longer an issue on this paper; the majority seemed able to pace themselves through most of the questions.

This series there were some impressive answers to the various extended response questions, especially in the topic areas of *Social Cognition*, *Autism* and, somewhat unusually, *Remembering and Forgetting*. Examiners were pleased to see examples of essays that included sophisticated evaluation, use of evidence and critical comparison, alongside detailed, accurate description. There were many full mark and top mark band answers, within which students were able to demonstrate a comprehensive grasp of the material under review, and fully meet the requirements of the question.

This was not the case for all, however, and there were some disappointing responses. The *Social Influence* essay question caused many students problems, and there were comparatively few top mark band answers.

The essay component of *Remembering and Forgetting* was generally well-answered. However, many students struggled with the short questions and this remains the weakest area of the paper. Students should be made aware of at least one study for each explanation of forgetting, and be able to produce at least one elaborated (ie three mark) criticism of each explanation.

Students are reminded that Quality of Written Communication is assessed on the ten mark answers and vague, inaccurate or ambiguous expression can limit the marks awarded in these questions. Although most students were able to articulate their knowledge and understanding to a reasonable standard, there were examples of very poor communication, such that the meaning of entire sentences was often difficult to discern.

The opportunity for schools and colleges to access the enhanced analysis for their entries for this component will provide detailed breakdown of student performance for each question part and should inform teaching.

## **Section A Social Psychology**

### **Topic: Social Influence**

#### **Question 01**

The majority of students were able to successfully identify 'independent measures' as the experimental design, although many confused 'design' with 'type of experiment', usually 'field', and failed to access any marks. 'Repeated measures' was also often stated though in these cases, students were at least able to access one mark if the advantage corresponded with the design they had given. Many students failed to make an appropriate link to the study described in their answer. However, some managed this by virtue of the fact that they went on to define 'independent measures' as 'participants only take part in one condition', thus the application in their answer was implied.

#### **Question 02**

This question was generally well answered with the Independent Variable (IV) and the Dependent Variable (DV) appropriately operationalized. Unfortunately, several students got these the wrong way round. Students should be reminded that it is best to state variables in an 'operational' form eg the DV could be given as 'number of people who picked up litter' but 'obedience' or 'level of obedience' would not gain credit.

#### **Question 03**

This question was generally very well answered with many students referring to the idea that a 'uniform' gives 'legitimacy to the authority figure/the orders', alongside an accurate likely outcome. However, some students did not state the likely outcome in terms of groups A or B in their answer. Other students offered only the outcome and so failed to access additional marks for 'explanation'. Some simply cited relevant evidence (usually Milgram or Bickman) without developing these into a coherent argument.

#### **Question 04**

The vast majority of students gained both marks for this question. Of those that did not, 'psychological harm' proved to be a less suitable choice of issue as it was difficult to link to the information available in the stem. Some students correctly identified '(lack of) consent' as an issue but then did little more than re-state the same phrase as part of their 'link' to the study/experiment described.

### **Question 05**

Generally, this was not one of the better answered essay questions on the paper, although most students did at least score within the mid-range of the mark scheme. There were many answers couched from an 'obedience' perspective: less successful students perhaps focussed on the material that had gone before and the description in the stem. Many students approached the essay as if they had been asked about 'explanations of conformity', presenting unfocused material describing 'normative' and 'informational influence'. Whilst this could have been used as a way of accessing AO2 marks to explain the effects of stated factors, this was often not the case. Very long descriptions of the Asch and/or Sherif experiments were commonplace, where the influence of relevant factors was not made explicit. There was also much generic methodological evaluation of these studies which tended not to add anything to the overall quality of the answer. For future reference, it might be worthwhile for teachers to limit 'factors' to the most obvious variables that have been studied in historical research. Factors such as 'self-esteem', though relevant, tend to restrict students in terms of AO2 marks, in the absence of relevant evidence.

### **Topic: Social Cognition**

#### **Question 06**

Most students correctly identified 'laboratory experiment'.

#### **Question 07**

Many students gained a mark by outlining the increased 'control' that is offered by laboratory experiments. Some failed to expand or substantiate the advantage cited, by failing to acknowledge that this would lead to 'more reliable cause and effect relationships', for instance.

#### **Question 08**

The comments made above in relation to question 02 are also relevant to this question.

#### **Question 09**

This question was almost always correctly answered.

#### **Question 10**

Answers scoring two marks were common here. Most students were able to state the likely outcome of the study described and a second mark was often awarded for a partial definition/explanation of the 'primacy effect'. Students needed to make it clear that 'the first information (not impression) received' had 'more influence than information received later' and this second element was often poorly communicated or missing from the answer.

#### **Question 11**

Another single mark question that presented few problems for most students – but surely 'all teachers' are not 'boring', are they?!

### **Question 12**

This question elicited a number of higher scoring, top mark band responses. Many students were able to discuss more than two explanations which allowed them to score well in terms of the breadth of knowledge demonstrated within their answer. Description of the various explanations was often sound and there were some excellent summaries of the 'Authoritarian Personality', in particular. 'Competition for resources' tended to provide students with less scope for detailed description, though the Robber's Cave study was often used to good effect in this context. There were also some very good, creditworthy illustrations of the explanations through the use of real-life examples. Generic methodological evaluation of evidence was perhaps less in evidence here than in the corresponding Social Influence essay, though it was still very much a feature of weaker answers. Other responses at the lower end of the scale included description of the 'La Piere' study of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour, without any effective link made to an explanation of prejudice. There were also some general outlines of the concept of 'stereotyping' that tended not to address the question.

## **Section B Cognitive Psychology**

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

#### **Question 13**

Many students did not give an unambiguous example of episodic memory. Many examples veered a little too close to semantic memory of 'facts', such as, 'remembering the date of my mum's birthday' or 'knowing that I had cornflakes for breakfast'. Examples of global or national events such as 9/11 or the Queen's Jubilee, needed to be personalised; for example, 'my memory for how I felt when I heard the news of 9/11' to become creditworthy. Examples of semantic memory presented fewer problems for students although there was occasionally confusion with procedural memory. Most students did not make their distinction point explicit, but having defined both types of memory in their answer – even though this was not required by the question – credit was awarded for an implicit distinction. Those students who did produce an explicit distinction point often correctly explained that information related to 'time and place' is necessary for the formation of an episodic memory, whilst this is not the case for semantic.

#### **Question 14**

Many students scored both marks for this question and the most popular route was to define the two types: proactive and retroactive (though occasionally, these were the wrong way round). Many explanations used words which did not clearly express the direction of the effort, such as 'old memories get mixed up with new'. Whereas, the expression 'old memories disrupt/interfere with new memories' makes this clear. As in previous series, the concept of 'interference' was sometimes confused with more general forms of 'distraction', such as extraneous background noise.

#### **Question 15**

Many students did not make it clear what separated the two conditions in their chosen study, or offered vague or muddled procedural details. Of the more successful answers, many students described the Baddeley & Hitch (1997) rugby players investigation.

### **Question 16**

This was one of the more poorly answered questions on the paper. Typically, students preferred to focus on the artificiality of the evidence supporting interference. However, this point was rarely developed beyond a single statement such as, 'studies lack ecological validity'. Those who did explore this issue in more detail pointed to the fact that (laboratory) studies are so designed to try and deliberately induce interference within short, compressed time-frames, thus reducing the validity of the evidence.

### **Question 17**

On the whole, this question was answered well. Many students were able to access all the AO1 marks for knowledge of the model. Teachers should remind students though, that ten mark answers are subject to the Quality of Written Communication criteria and there is a limit to the credit that can be awarded for descriptions presented solely in the form of a labelled diagram (actually two marks in this question).

Relevant evidence was often very well described but was not always related effectively to the central claims of the model, for instance, the 'functional separation/distinction between stores'. Most students were able to make relevant evaluative points about the multi-store model (MSM) but some were overly brief or speculative, for example, 'the model has proved influential'. Similarly, points of comparison with alternative models were often cursory and under-developed, for example, 'the STM is passive unlike the Working Memory...' Having said this, there were lots of impressive answers and this was clearly an area of the subject that students knew well.

## **Topic: Perceptual Processes**

### **Question 18**

There were many correct answers but single word identifications did not always include sufficient detail, for example, 'texture' is better written as 'texture gradient'.

### **Question 19**

Many students identified 'size constancy' as part of their answer but often failed to expand or elaborate upon this. Differences/discrepancies in the retinal image were rarely explained effectively, but some understanding of 'a change in distance' was often sufficient to secure the second mark.

### **Question 20**

There were many clear and detailed explanations of binocular depth cues, with 'retinal disparity' proving to be the most popular. Some students, however, could only identify one of these without further expansion. Others explained, but did not name, a depth cue, and were awarded two marks as a result.

### **Question 21**

Most students were able to identify a distortion illusion through naming or producing a diagram, though some gave an example of an ambiguous figure. The majority were able to outline their chosen illusion appropriately by describing its effect. However, the third explanation mark proved more elusive for many. Students who referenced the 'carpentered world hypothesis', for instance, needed to give further details of how this would influence perception of, for example, the Muller-Lyer Illusion.

### **Question 22**

Among several good answers there were those that identified key terms and phrases related to Gregory's theory – such as 'concept-driven', 'hypothesis testing' and 'use of inference' - but did so in what was almost equivalent to a list, when elaboration of these terms was also required.

Evidence from illusion studies and infant perception studies was often appropriately selected but not always effectively linked to the explanation. Some students gave details of Gibson's theory but this material had to be used as critical commentary on Gregory's theory and not merely described. As a consequence, there were many answers scoring seven or eight, but far fewer in the top mark band.

## **Section C *Individual Differences***

### **Topic: Anxiety Disorders**

#### **Question 23**

This was generally very well answered; although some students described symptoms of a phobia, most were able to access both marks.

#### **Question 24**

Lots of students acquired two marks using a fairly economical route: by making reference to 'unconscious conflict' and briefly outlining the concept of 'displacement'. However, some gave often lengthy descriptions of general psychodynamic principles that were not always made relevant to phobias.

#### **Question 25**

As in question 16, students were required to expand upon a single point for three marks, but in contrast, answers were much more comprehensive here than in the Remembering and Forgetting section. Many successful answers dealt with the 'unscientific/unfalsifiable' nature of psychodynamic explanations and were appropriately elaborated.



### Question 26

The most frequently cited cognitive techniques in this question were 'habituation training' and the formulation of 'counter-statements', which were often, though not always, outlined. It was not uncommon to see answers that strayed too far towards behaviourist procedures to get credit, such as when students outlined the steps involved in systematic desensitisation. Many answers were relatively generic in nature, such as the idea of 'identify, challenge and change'. These correct possibilities needed to be elaborated and applied to the information in the stem to be given credit. Finally, many answers, though accurate and detailed, failed to adequately engage with the stem. Many students assumed that merely mentioning 'Anita' was sufficient in this regard, rather than attempting to link their answer to her obsession with security.

### Question 27

Other than students who wrote about phobias rather than OCD, this question was generally answered well. Most students, quite legitimately, wrote about several explanations under a general biological or cognitive 'umbrella', although there were also some accurate behaviourist and psychodynamic explanations. As such, answers that scored well tended to do so in terms of their breadth rather than depth. There were very few answers that dealt with a smaller range of ideas with appropriate explanation and evaluation.

Evaluative points were fewer in number than in similar questions in previous series but appeared to be more reasoned and better explained. However, many students focused too much of their analysis on treatment options to the detriment of the answer, especially when discussing biological causes. Finally, and unfortunately, many students produced answers rich in description and commentary but failed to include reference to evidence, and were limited to six marks as a consequence.

## Topic: Autism

### Question 28

This was generally well answered. Some students included extraneous material related to the 'Smartie tube' test such as the aim, findings and conclusion of Perner's study (though adequate procedural detail still meant they gained both marks). Some weaker responses did not address the fact that the child would be asked what *somebody else* would think was in the tube and tended to score just one of the two marks available.

### Questions 29

This question presented students with few problems. As in previous series where this question has been asked, the second symptom some students gave was not a separate symptom, but an example/elaboration of the first, as in the case of repetitive behaviour and hand flapping.

### Question 30

Some students appeared a little bemused by this question. Whilst some failed to link their answer to a specific symptom and talked about cognitive explanations in general, others wrote about lack of joint attention as if it were a cognitive explanation, rather than a symptom that could be explained by a cognitive explanation. Many of the better answers talked about a lack of empathy from a 'theory of mind' perspective.

### **Question 31**

Answers here were usually focused on twin studies, often citing concordance rates, before going on to suggest that these imply some sort of environmental influence. This approach appeared to fit the three mark format well. As with other questions of this type though, there were many answers that did not go beyond a brief statement of the limitation, and scored a single mark only.

### **Question 32**

Most answers were based around varieties of behaviour modification and drug therapy, and these tended to be the most successful. There were some excellent descriptions of modification procedures and the Lovaas study was often described well and used effectively. Accounts of drug therapy had an occasional tendency to be a little muddled or lacking in AO1 detail: students often went little further than identifying types of drugs, whereas others talked in detail about modes of action and specific symptoms. The McCracken study was often used to good effect.

Discussions of parental involvement were, on the whole, less convincing and lots of the subsequent evaluation points were vague and speculative. A small minority of answers included explanations of aversion therapy (although this was occasionally referred to as ECT) that often gave rise to a one-sided consideration of the ethical implications of this treatment, with little appreciation of the risks set against the benefits.

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

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