



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

**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***

Most candidates paced themselves through the examination well and there were very few examples of unfinished answers. There were some instances where candidates produced quite short responses to the questions set. This was noticeable in the long form answer questions – essays – where very concise answers of two paragraphs were sometimes presented as responses that had been allocated 10 marks.

Overall, candidates' performances on the paper were comparable with the standards seen in previous sessions for PSYB2. In particular, responses to the short answer sections were often very good. However, descriptions of studies were poorer and not always accurate, including invented details of procedure or results. Question popularity remains in the following order: Remembering and Forgetting, Social Influence, Anxiety Disorders, Autism, Social Cognition and Perceptual Processes.

Candidates are reminded that quality of written communication is assessed on the 10-mark answers in this unit and vague, inaccurate or ambiguous expression can limit the marks awarded in these questions. In addition, there were some appalling spelling errors, especially for 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 some psychological terms and never seen them used in text.

It was noticeable that some candidates had a very limited understanding of the experimental method and found it extremely difficult to access the AO3 marks allocated to this material in the Cognitive Psychology topic areas. It seemed to be the case that some centres have not prepared their candidates for this type of question.

Responses to questions worth 10 marks were slightly formulaic with regard to AO2 marks. Candidates are again reminded that credit is awarded for explanation/discussion/analysis of evaluative points rather than a list of 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. Some candidates have started to express their answers in the form: 'a positive is... a negative is...' followed by a brief list of unelaborated statements.

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

## **Section A Social Psychology**

### **Topic Social Influence**

#### **Question 01**

There was much confusion about the meaning of the term *dominant response*. Often candidates failed to convey the 'most likely to occur' aspect and instead focused on learning of dominant responses and suggested that they are either well rehearsed or not well rehearsed indicating they seemed to think there are different types of dominant response.

#### **Question 02**

Many candidates were able to explain why Simon performed badly and referred to evaluation apprehension, distraction conflict and arousal effects appropriately. Some responses were a confusion of all possible effects on performance and there were repetitive responses such as: 'he is affected by evaluation apprehension because he is being evaluated' with little elaboration of what is meant by evaluation and of *by whom?* Others compounded their lack of understanding of *dominant responses* by discussion of how the audience brings out the non-dominant response or how dominant responses are impaired or improved by audiences.

#### **Question 03**

Candidates were well versed in descriptions of obedience studies, but often failed to adapt these to an accurate answer in which the focus of the response was defiance.

#### **Question 04**

Some candidates responded well to this question and demonstrated quite good understanding of the two named explanations of conformity. Others found it more difficult to adapt their knowledge and understanding of conformity into a suitable response. Knowledge of normative and informational social influence was often reduced to statements such as: 'It means you publicly agree and privately agree/disagree' with little expansion of what was being agreed to by participants. In particular, candidates' description and use of relevant studies was often quite poor. For example, In Asch's study participants had to find the longest line and in Sherif's study there were confederates. Results were often in the form: 'they conformed,' with no accurate description of how many/how often and in which conditions or variations. Candidates also spent much time on fruitless discussion of ethical issues without explaining how such issues related to the explanation they were supposed to be analysing by weakening or supporting the explanation. Points were often in the format – a criticism of this study is... The weakest answers focused on factors affecting conformity.

## **Topic Social Cognition**

### **Question 05**

Candidates were usually able to gain some credit for their knowledge of stereotyping.

### **Question 06**

This was generally quite well answered and most candidates could relate both the primacy effect and central traits to the scenario. However, some did not focus on the key aspect of either the first information or a particular trait having an impact the impression formed.

### **Question 07**

There was some confusion with the self-serving bias in this question. Also, some candidates lost marks because their descriptions lacked accuracy.

### **Question 08**

Candidates were able to use their knowledge of explanations of prejudice reasonably well in their answers to this question. Again, critical points often lacked expansion and candidates should try to provide more detailed analysis in their evaluative assessments.

## **Section B Cognitive Psychology**

### **Topic Remembering and Forgetting**

#### **Question 09**

Although many candidates were able to identify the independent and dependent variables accurately, some assigned their answers incorrectly and therefore gained no marks. The dependent variable was sometimes reported as the time allowed and the independent variable as the conditions.

#### **Question 10**

Understanding of the term independent groups was quite good although a significant proportion of candidates confused this with repeated measures.

#### **Question 11**

Candidates struggled to express an advantage of using independent groups in research and in general answers lacked precision and did not go beyond vague references to order effects.

#### **Question 12**

This question exposed a fundamental misunderstanding of one of the basic features of the short term memory store. The majority of candidates were unable to predict the likely results that recall of words that sounded different would be higher than that of the list of similar sounding words. This would be the case because the short term memory codes information acoustically so recall of words in the correct order would be impaired.

### **Question 13**

Although candidates were able to identify a limitation of the multi-store model of memory, their explanations of why the limitation was an issue were often quite weak. Many suggested that the model was 'simplified' because it failed to explain how information transferred from short to long term memory.

### **Question 14**

In this question candidates were able to choose any two explanations of forgetting and it was disappointing that answers were often quite limited and descriptions confused or lacking accurate detail. Descriptions of lack of consolidation often failed to consider the biological aspects of memory and some candidates seemed to think that the concussed rugby players had been hit on the head on purpose. Retrieval failure was described as 'old interferes with new and new with old' with no elaboration of what the terms 'old' and 'new' were a reference to and which information is not retrieved. In explanations of motivated forgetting people are reported as 'pushing' information into the unconscious rather than this being an unconscious defence mechanism. Again, evaluation of the explanations was often vague or unexpanded and there was an emphasis on reporting the artificiality of tasks without discussion of why this might impact on the explanation. Candidates often did not seem to appreciate the use of nonsense trigrams as a means of eliminating the influence of past experience in memory research.

## **Topic Perceptual Processes**

### **Question 15**

About a third of candidates were unable to gain any marks for identification of the independent and dependent variables.

### **Question 16**

Some candidates provided a more theoretical rather than methodological explanation of the requirement that the two lines should be the same length and were awarded credit accordingly. However, in general a lack of ability to express their answers with clarity impeded access to marks for some candidates.

### **Question 17**

Answers to this question showed the full range of understanding and some candidates provided very good explanations of the likely results and why they would occur.

### **Question 18**

Although it was clear that candidates understood the question, many failed to expand their answers beyond brief statements such as 'perception is active.'

### **Question 19**

Some candidates were well prepared for this question and achieved scores in the upper mark bands, however, they sometimes did not refer to evidence in their responses and this limited their ability to access the top of the mark bands. Candidates should be aware that in evaluation of Gibson's theory of visual perception reference to research that indicates top down processing occurs is relevant to the discussion.

## **Section C Individual Differences**

### **Topic Anxiety Disorders**

#### **Question 20**

This was often well answered however there were some weak responses such as ‘thinking about something’ or ‘obsessive thoughts’.

#### **Question 21**

Responses such as ‘performing a behaviour’ or ‘compulsive behaviours’ could not gain credit.

#### **Question 22**

Candidates were able to refer to a psychodynamic explanation of OCD as based on an unconscious process but often detail of the importance of stages and conflict and the use of defence mechanisms was lacking.

#### **Question 23**

Often candidates did not develop their answers beyond merely stating a possible limitation and it was not always clear how the limitation related to OCD rather than just being a general issue with psychodynamic theory. Some candidates offered the idea that a limitation of the psychodynamic explanation is that it is not a biological explanation.

#### **Question 24**

Many candidates were able to offer at least one key feature of a phobia. Some did spend a great deal of time naming the different types of phobias.

#### **Question 25**

There were some very good answers that described treatments for phobias accurately and then evaluated these. Others involved extremely muddled responses in which therapies that were named were not described as in: naming *cognitive* but describing *psychodynamic*. In behavioural therapy candidates often failed to mention relaxation as a key component of systematic desensitisation.’ In flooding therapy candidates made vague reference to clients ‘realising’ that their fear was irrational without mention of the anxiety both rising and then subsiding. Descriptions of cognitive therapy were often very vague. Candidates did not always know how therapists attempt to change the way a phobic client might think and suggested that the therapist would change their thinking or replace the thoughts. There was lots of inaccuracy in comments about drug therapy. Some candidates discussed exposure and response prevention which is more commonly associated with OCD.

## **Topic Autism**

### **Question 26**

Many candidates failed to present descriptions of behaviours that children with autism lack and are also examples of joint attention, instead focusing on general impairments. Credit was awarded when the behaviours described clearly related to an activity involving two people, for example, pointing.

### **Question 27**

Many candidates were able to outline the deficits required although some did not relate their answers to an absence of ability. Some candidates described failure of executive functioning or lack of theory of mind. Examples were sometimes rather sweeping generalisations implying that all autistic children can recognise all notes in a musical piece or never recognise a car just each wheel!

### **Question 28**

Candidates coped well with this question and the use of research evidence to discuss the genetic explanation was generally good.

### **Question 29**

There were some good answers to this question. When describing and discussing the Lovaas technique answers were sometimes rather vague with a reference to 'one-to-one' therapy. There was very limited description of what parents might do in parental involvement techniques. Candidates should be encouraged to be more sensitive in their answers as there were very extreme descriptions of all children banging their heads or not able to communicate. However, some were very aware of the tension between therapies that might make life better for the adults coping with a child who has autism as opposed to the benefits that might accrue to the child.

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

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.