

OXFORD

INTERNATIONAL
AQA EXAMINATIONS

INTERNATIONAL A-LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

(9685) PS04 Paper 4

Report on the examination

June 2022

REPORT ON EXAMINATION: INTERNATIONAL A-LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY 9685 UNIT PS04 JUNE 2022

General

It was pleasing to see that many students demonstrated very good understanding across all three sections of the exam. Many were able to apply their knowledge and it was apparent that they had been well prepared for this examination. There were some variations in marks across the three sections with Section A (Approaches) and B (Issues and debates) answered relatively well and Section C (Applied Psychology: Work and the individual) answered less well. It was pleasing to note that most students managed their time well and completed all questions on the paper in the time allowed.

There was some variation in the engagement with questions with some students failing to address the demands of the question. For example, offering description where the requirement was for evaluation. The extended writing questions (Questions 3, 8 and 11) were often well answered with most students able to offer relevant material, useful application (where required) and balanced evaluation. Going forward, students should aim to engage with scenarios more effectively; going beyond the detail given in the scenario to interpret and explain the behaviour using appropriate theory. They should develop evaluation further by discussing how well or poorly a particular study demonstrates the concepts and theories outlined in AO1.

Students should also take care with the balance of assessment objectives in questions that involve extended writing. Students should be reminded that AO1 is worth 6 or 8 marks in extended writing questions and they should be advised not to provide over-elaborated details, in description in order to achieve the correct balance in their answers. In particular, descriptions of studies should be reduced to 'what was done' and what it showed' information, rather than lengthy details which can reduce the time left for analysis and interpretation skills.

The quality of responses varied depending on which assessment objective was being addressed. Students performed very well when demonstrating knowledge and understanding (AO1), slightly less well when applying this to novel scenarios (AO2) and performance was notably weaker when analysing or evaluating information was required, (AO3). It is important that students develop each of the assessment objective skills equally, so they can effectively address the demands of all three skills in an examination setting.

Questions involving knowledge of Psychology and Science (questions 4 and 6) were often poorly answered. This suggested that some students had little practical experience of carrying out psychological research which would support their understanding of concepts such as; empirical testing and the idea of falsification of a null hypothesis. It is important that students have opportunities for practical investigations, so they understand these concepts fully and can then apply them in an examination setting.

Most students wrote their responses clearly in the appropriate space provided. However, some responses stopped mid-sentence and it was unclear whether the answer continued elsewhere in the question paper, or on additional pages. Students who need to write more than the space provided allows should use the additional pages at the end of the question paper booklet and should indicate that their answer continues. They should write the question number on the additional page. These

additional pages will then be matched with the response and marked as a complete answer. It is important that students do not write outside the boxes as this material may not be seen by the examiner and thus may not be marked.

Section A: Approaches in Psychology

Question 01

Most students gained half of the marks for this question due to poor application and spending too much time on description of irrelevant twin studies of schizophrenia which also cost them time and received no credit. Students should have quoted/compared the figures in this question and then applied relevant knowledge to explain these results.

Question 02

Many students failed to read the command word 'evaluate'. Consequently, most students only picked up one third of the marks because they spent time describing rather than evaluating computer models. Students should take time to read the question carefully.

Question 03

Students tackled this question well with most responses achieving level three. Most students chose to talk about classical and operant conditioning through the work of Pavlov and Skinner which worked well. Best answers used the topics in evaluation, for example, offering discussion of the effectiveness of practical applications of behaviourist theories, such as in a token economy to improve behaviour in the classroom and in systematic desensitisation as a treatment for phobias.

Section B: Issues and Debates in Psychology

Question 04

Less than half chose the correct answer for this multiple-choice question. This is because many students did not seem to have a good grasp of the scientific method in psychology. Students should work on their understanding of the scientific method as a process and should aim to carry out practical work and mini experiments to help with this.

Question 05.1

This was better answered with most students gaining one mark for naming a type of determinism.

Question 05.2

Most students did well on this question providing a clear outline of the free-will determinism debate.

Question 05.3

Many students achieved just under half marks for this question with many failing to offer a clear advantage of having a belief in free-will. Better responses offered arguments supporting belief in the judicial system and links between a perception of free-will and positive mental health. It would be useful to use theories taught in other modules for discussion on where each of these stands with respect to all the debates. This would give clearer understanding of how to tackle this type of question in the future.

Question 06

This question was not well answered with many students only gaining 1 or 2 marks. Students often lacked basic knowledge of the scientific method in psychology and many clearly did not understand the word 'empirical'. Carrying out practical work wherever possible would help overcome this deficit. In addition, students could prepare for this type of question by analysing studies taught in other modules breaking these down to show components of the scientific process and stating whether the methodologies used followed the empirical method or not.

Question 07

Most students achieved 1 or 2 marks for this question showing that they understood holism and reductionism. Better students were able to apply their knowledge very well and could explain going for a walk as neurones taking messages from the brain to the muscles and making them walk (biological reductionism). They could also explain how going for a walk might be understood on a holistic level by offering social and cultural reasons for going for a walk with a friend. However, in some cases the knowledge was not well applied to the stem. Students could prepare for this type of question using their own scenarios, for example, they could practise explaining 'baking a cake' at reductionist and holistic levels. They could use similar scenarios for the other debates.

Question 08

Most students gained level three marks for this question demonstrating good knowledge and understanding. They were able to apply this to Bilal and Abdullah and offer some useful evaluation of the interactionist approach. However, some misread the question and treated nature and nurture as two separate debates rather than focusing on interactionism. This gained little credit. Students should take time to read questions carefully so that they understand fully the demands of the question.

Section C: Applied Psychology: Work and the Individual

Question 09.1

This question was well answered with most students able to name two other features of goal-setting theory. However, many failed to gain marks by offering irrelevant material, such as SMART targets.

Question 09.2

Many students knew the features of goal-setting theory but failed to apply these to motivating shop workers in the supermarket. Better students gave detailed answers on specific goals such as taking responsibility for a specific area, for example, the fruit and vegetable aisle, keeping it well stocked and tidy. Students could prepare more effectively for this type of question by making up and/or using familiar work-place scenarios and applying theories so that they acquire practice in 'going beyond' the scenario content to give well-imagined, concrete examples.

Question 09.3

Most students failed to offer a strength of goal setting theory and, instead, continued to apply it to the stem, often making repeat points. Better students were able to offer developments of goal setting theory such as the SMART technique and/or that it could be usefully applied across cultures. Once again, students should make sure they read the injunction or command word carefully. This will help them to avoid wasting time writing information that will gain little credit.

Question 10

Many students knew about job strain and workload and could quote the Marmot study on the role of control in stress and illness. However, a significant number could not usefully apply this information to Mr. Taylor. As mentioned above, for question 09.2, students could better prepare for this type of question by making up and using familiar work-place scenarios and applying theories so that they gain practice in 'going beyond' the scenario to give well-imagined concrete examples.

Question 11

This question was poorly answered by most students with many offering knowledge of deindividuation and group think instead of social identity theory. Consequently, any evaluation was often not relevant. Better answers could offer knowledge of the three key stages in SIT and research to support/refute the theory. Some may have run out of time. Others did not achieve the appropriate balance in answers for example, spending too long on AO1 that was only allocated 6 marks. For others, weak performance may have been due to failure to organise information under the correct topic and sub-topic headings of the specification such that they were unsure about which information to offer. Students need to organise their learning so that they can readily recall the information they require.

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