



## Course Report 2016

Subject	Psychology
Level	National 5

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

# Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

## Summary of the Course assessment

The course assessment was in line with expectations. Feedback from the examining team and practitioners was positive and indicated that the assessment was fair and accessible. Candidates were provided with the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they had acquired across the course.

Overall, candidates performed well in the course assessment. Candidates were well prepared and were working at the appropriate level.

## Component 1: question paper

The question paper comprised one 20-mark question on the mandatory topic of sleep and dreams, and two 15-mark questions on the optional topics from the Individual Behaviour unit and the Social Behaviour unit. Candidates demonstrated competence in applying their knowledge and understanding of psychological approaches, theories, concepts and research evidence to explain the topics.

Q3 (15 marks): some candidates wrote about the mandatory topic of conformity instead of their optional topic. These candidates were unable to access full marks.

## Component 2: assignment

The assignment required candidates to use their investigation skills to plan an appropriate research study. The assignment had 30 marks out of a total of 80 for course assessment.

Although there were fewer issues than last year, some candidates were unable to access the four marks for ethics because they were planning unethical research studies, for example:

- ◆ to replicate Asch's line comparison study
- ◆ to disturb participants' sleep
- ◆ to select vulnerable participants
- ◆ to measure public displays of conformity

## **Section 2: Comments on candidate performance**

### **Areas in which candidates performed well**

#### **Component 1: question paper**

Candidates performed particularly well in Question 1. They were able to apply their knowledge and skills to answer specific questions on the mandatory topic and did not simply regurgitate knowledge. Higher-order thinking skills were evident.

Q1(a) and (b): Candidates were able to use the biological approach to explain the topic of sleep and dreams. Candidates did not simply explain the approach and the strength/weakness.

Q2: Candidates who selected mindsets as the optional topic for the Individual Behaviour unit performed particularly well. These candidates used the positive psychology approach to explain mindsets in Q2 (a). Candidates who selected phobias as the optional topic also performed well. These candidates used the behaviourist approach in Q2 (a) to explain phobias.

Q3: Candidates who selected non-verbal communication as their optional topic for the Social Behaviour Unit performed very well. Candidates who selected altruism also performed particularly well.

#### **Component 2: assignment**

It was evident that candidates were afforded some personalisation and choice in choosing which aspect of their topics to investigate. Candidates were not following a formulaic response, indicating that it was their own work.

The majority of candidates used an appropriate format to present their plan and accurate terminology was used. All candidates adhered to the word limit.

Candidates showed a good understanding of the research process and were able to describe and justify their choice of sampling method and research method. The National 5 candidates gave appropriately written hypotheses for the proposed research study.

Centres are to be commended for providing reasonable support which allowed the candidates to select topics of interest and complete the report.

### **Areas which candidates found demanding**

#### **Component 1: question paper**

Q2 (a) (i) Describe your optional topic from Individual Behaviour: A few candidates wrote about their optional topic from Social Behaviour.

Q2 (ii) 'Explain this topic using one psychological approach. Do not use the psychoanalytic or biological approach, use a different approach you have studied': A number of candidates

gave no response for this question. Many candidates gave poor responses. Candidates who selected the optional topics of stress and memory found this question particularly challenging.

Q3 (a) Explain your optional topic from Social Behaviour using psychological concepts/theories. (6): A significant number of candidates wrote about conformity instead of their optional topic, so were unable to access these 6 marks.

### **Component 2: Assignment**

Candidates who selected the topic of conformity frequently planned unethical research studies.

Many candidates who had planned ethical research did not access the full 4 marks because they gave generic descriptions of the BPS guidelines rather than applying them to their own plan.

For Section B it appeared that some centres were following the briefs from the previous Higher course, and were approaching this section as an Introduction with broad psychological perspectives/theories/research studies. These candidates did not attain high marks. Candidates who followed the detailed marking instructions for the assignment and described how two research studies contributed to an understanding of their topic, attained high marks.

## **Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: question paper**

Candidates were very well prepared for the topic of sleep and dreams. Teachers/lecturers are to be commended for this as it is a new topic for many practitioners.

It is evident that teachers/lecturers clearly used the approaches to explain the topics and did not spend too long introducing the approaches.

When selecting the optional topic for the Individual Behaviour unit, three approaches must be used to explain the topic. This may limit the topics that can be delivered in the course.

There was evidence that some candidates were being taught more than one optional topic for each unit. The National 5 course is delivered over two years in some centres. It may be worth considering how to spend the time delivering skills and applying knowledge rather than increasing the content of the course.

Teachers/lecturers are encouraged to deliver new topics and approaches to keep the course up-to-date with new developments in psychology.

Teachers/lecturers should continue to ensure that candidates are familiar with the structure of the paper, and that candidates are aware of which topics are mandatory and which optional (and that mandatory topics may not be asked about in the external assessment). It is also pertinent that candidates can easily identify which optional topic is from the Individual Behaviour Unit and which is from the Social Behaviour Unit.

It is acknowledged that teachers/lecturers have been emphasising this to candidates and that exam nerves would have been a contributory factor to candidates explaining conformity in Section 3 when asked about their optional topic from the Social Behaviour Unit. Likewise, anxiety on the day of the exam may have led candidates to explaining their optional topic from the Social Behaviour Unit when asked to explain their optional topic from the Individual Behaviour Unit in Section 2. In an attempt to avoid this confusion, it is recommended that all resources are labelled with mandatory/optional topic and social/individual behaviour unit (if this is not already being done).

## **Component 2: assignment**

Most candidates used the headings A–F when planning their research and some teachers/lecturers provided candidates with a template to complete.

Centres are reminded that the detailed marking instructions are an essential resource when supporting candidates. It is here that it is made explicit that, for section B, information must be drawn from two research studies to explain the topic.

It is important that teachers/lecturers approve the candidates' selection of a topic before the candidate begins the task. This will help to ensure that candidates adhere to the BPS guidelines. If a research plan could potentially lead to physical/psychological harm, including embarrassment, candidates cannot be awarded the four marks for ethics. Centres may consider setting up an ethics committee consisting of other social science disciplines, including teachers/lecturers/candidates.

## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	354
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	631
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### Statistical information: Performance of candidates

#### Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	32.6%	32.6%	206	56
B	19.2%	51.8%	121	48
C	16.8%	68.6%	106	40
D	7.9%	76.5%	50	36
No award	23.5%	-	148	-

## General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.