



## External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Psychology
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

# Comments on candidate performance

## General comments

### External paper

This year there was a significant increase in candidates sitting Higher Psychology with six new centres.

Performance in the exam increased this year, which might suggest that the revised syllabus is now firmly embedded. Similar to last year, candidates continued to demonstrate good knowledge and understanding, as well as skills of analysis and evaluation. This was evident in the Section C essay responses where candidates generally made good attempts to answer the questions, as opposed to writing everything they know about a topic without any reference to the question. However, candidates did not always use research evidence — something that should be encouraged in teaching.

### Research Investigation

The average mark was similar to last year and consistent with those of previous years.

Most centres followed the research briefs provided, allowing candidates to maximise their marks. However, candidates from a few centres deviated significantly from the briefs, with the result that these candidates could not access all the available marks.

Markers still continue to raise ethical issues, for example the inclusion of participants' names on consent forms. A few centres also used participants under the age of 16, which is inappropriate.

Generally, candidates used appropriate terminology and followed the required report format, but there were several who often used the present tense and first person. Reports are generally written in third person and in past tense when referring to previous research.

Some candidates submitted their Log Books, which are part of the Investigating Behaviour Unit NAB evidence. This is not required for external assessment and has been documented in previous External Assessment Reports.

Presentation again was generally good, but still many candidates included their results in the appendices, with raw data and calculations, as well as appendices (for example a picture of the jar of sweets in the Conformity experiment) were often missing.

Some candidates seemed to produce rather 'formulaic' sections – particularly the Introduction section. Although candidates should be provided with guidance on how to write the report, it should still be an independent piece of work.

Again, as in previous years, in the Discussion section, candidates continued to be generic in terms of their evaluation. Candidates who were more specific in identifying problems in the research, and who suggested possible solutions, gained higher marks. Also, like last year,

suggestions for future research were often poor, many candidates simply suggesting a larger sample be used rather than something more meaningful and related to furthering the research conducted.

Many candidates continued to include a bibliography instead of references, although the use of Harvard referencing is becoming more frequent.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

Section B continued to produce some of the higher marks for candidates, but this was not universal. There were still some candidates who produced poor responses in this section.

In Section C, many candidates produced excellent essays, with a significant number achieving full marks.

Again, it was reported by markers that there was evidence of more use of psychological terminology and less of the 'story-telling' and 'common sense' type responses that have been found in previous years.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

Question A1b) on daycare was not always well answered — not many candidates related their response to **cognitive** development.

Question C4, the essay on definitions of Atypical Behaviour, seemed to produce responses that covered the **models** rather than the **definitions**. However, many candidates answered this question very well.

## Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres are advised to follow the relevant documents ie Arrangements Documents, Course Assessment Specification etc. The Markers' Checklist and Research Investigation Guidelines for the Research Investigation are also useful when teaching candidates how to write the report.

Specimen question papers and past papers, and their marking instructions, should also be useful. It can be very helpful for candidates to attempt past papers, especially essay questions, to allow them to obtain feedback on their performance and practice exam techniques. It is likely that this is already taking place in many centres, as the essay responses continue to improve.

Candidates should be encouraged to use appropriate terminology. Terms 'prove' and 'significant' were often used incorrectly in question paper responses as well as in the research investigation. Inappropriate use should be discouraged. Candidates should also be encouraged to use research evidence when answering questions and to think about why that research evidence is relevant.

When planning the Research Investigation, centres must ensure that the briefs are adhered to so that candidates can maximise their marks. Candidates should be encouraged to

elaborate on the point they make, especially in the Discussion section, particularly when identifying problems and suggesting appropriate solutions.

Candidates should also be encouraged to conduct some independent research of background studies to help increase their understanding of the topic they are researching.

Better quality experiences and learning can be achieved, as well as better marks. In addition, this is less likely to produce formulaic reports.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	3099
Number of resulted entries in 2013	3370

## Statistical information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 125				
A	36.7%	36.7%	1237	89
B	20.9%	57.6%	705	75
C	17.4%	75.0%	585	62
D	6.7%	81.7%	226	55
No award	18.3%	100.0%	617	-

## 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.