



## External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Psychology
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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

There was a slight increase in the number of candidate entries for Higher Psychology this year, which reflected the growth in the number of new centres delivering this qualification.

The distribution of marks would suggest that the 'revised syllabus' is now fully embedded. The percentage of candidates who passed this year was slightly lower than last year, but was consistent with previous years. Candidates continue to demonstrate good knowledge and understanding, as well as skills of analysis and evaluation. This was demonstrated in the Section C essay responses, where candidates generally made good attempts to answer the questions, as opposed to writing everything known about a topic without any reference to the question.

In some instances, for example the Resisting Social Pressure essay, candidates often gave answers referring to conformity and obedience in general without applying it to the question topic. Candidates should be encouraged to include research evidence where appropriate as this was often missing.

### Research Investigation

The average mark was consistent with those achieved in previous years.

The majority of centres followed the research briefs provided by the SQA, which are designed to allow candidates to maximise their marks. However, there were several centres which deviated from the briefs significantly, which resulted in a loss of opportunity for some candidates to achieve all of the available marks.

There continue to be a number of candidates from a range of centres who are submitting Research Investigations that contain ethical breaches. The most common of these breaches occurred when candidates included participants' names on consent forms in their appendices, and on occasions where research participants were under the age of 16. Centres should adhere to the briefs provided and also refer to the Ethical Guidelines provided on the SQA website to avoid a repeat of these problems in the future.

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.

Repeatedly candidates are submitting their Log Books, which are part of the Investigating Behaviour Unit NAB evidence. This is not required for external assessment.

Report presentation was generally good, though many candidates included their results in the appendices, in addition to raw data and calculations. Conversely, in other reports some

of the appendices (eg 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. 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. Those candidates who were more specific in identifying problems in the research and who suggested possible solutions, gained higher marks. Also, suggestions for future research were often poor with many candidates simply suggesting a larger sample should be used rather than using this opportunity to state something more meaningful and relate this to furthering the research conducted.

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

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

Section B produced some high marks for candidates, but not to the extent of previous years. This is probably due to the poor responses to the questions on experimental design.

Section C — many candidates produced excellent essays, often achieving full marks.

The use of psychological terminology was more evident than in previous years, which reflects an improvement in this area.

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

Question A1(a) on the Psychoanalytic theory of attachment was not always well answered, with many candidates confusing Bowlby's theory with Freud's.

Question A1(b) on the effects of deprivation saw many candidates including privation studies instead of deprivation studies.

Section B(d) and (e) on experimental design were very poorly answered, with a significant amount of candidates confusing **design** with **methods**.

Question C3, the essay on Resisting Social Pressure, seemed to produce many responses which simply covered Conformity and Obedience in general and did not answer the question.

Occasionally in the essay questions, candidates did not include relevant research or names and dates for research. Some candidates simply described studies at length rather than using them to answer the question.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

Centres should follow the relevant Course Arrangements Documents and the Course Assessment Specification. The Markers' Checklist for the Research Investigation is also useful in helping centres to teach candidates how to write the report and access the full range of marks.

In the Research Investigation, centres must ensure that the briefs are adhered to so that the candidates can maximise their marks. Candidates should be encouraged to elaborate on the points they make, especially in the Discussion section, particularly when identifying problems and suggesting appropriate solutions.

Centres should encourage candidates to check they have included all of their appendices, to maximise their attainment of marks.

Centres should also refer to the Ethical Guidelines and ensure that candidates do not include names of participants within the report or use participants under the age of 16.

Candidates should be encouraged to conduct some independent research or background studies to help increase their understanding of their chosen research topic. Better quality experiences and learning can be achieved, through this, as well as greater attainment of marks. It is also less likely to produce formulaic reports.

Specimen/past papers and their accompanying marking instructions are also useful. It can be very helpful for candidates to attempt past papers, especially essay questions, to allow them to obtain feedback on their performance. It is likely that this is already taking place in many centres, demonstrated by the fact that essay responses continue to improve.

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

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	3370
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	3479
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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 125				
A	30.9%	30.9%	1076	87
B	19.8%	50.7%	689	74
C	17.8%	68.5%	618	62
D	6.9%	75.4%	239	56
No award	24.6%	-	857	-

## 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.