



Course Report 2015

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 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

The question paper gave learners an opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ explaining psychological concepts, theories, approaches and terminology
- ◆ applying knowledge and understanding of psychology to explain human behaviour
- ◆ using research evidence to explain behaviour
- ◆ interpreting basic descriptive statistics in psychological research

The question paper had three questions: two questions had 15 marks and one had 20 marks. Candidates were questioned on mandatory and optional topics.

The question paper was accessible, and candidates had generally been entered at the correct level. Skills-based questions and knowledge-based questions were answered to a high standard by many candidates.

Component 2: Assignment

The assignment gave learners an opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ using basic investigation skills to select, organise and interpret information in psychology
- ◆ knowing and understanding the basic research process in psychology, including the ability to explain the strengths and weaknesses of methods and to describe ethical and scientific standards
- ◆ using communication skills appropriate to psychology

This assignment had 30 marks out of a total of 80 marks for Course assessment. Many candidates performed very well in the Assignment.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

Overall, candidates performed very well in the question paper. They were able to apply their knowledge and understanding of psychological approaches, theories, research evidence and concepts to explain the topics. The majority of candidates used terminology appropriate to this level of study.

Fortunately, only a very small number of candidates got confused between the mandatory and optional topics. A small number confused the social and the individual topics.

In Q1 (d) and Q3 (a) a few candidates explained their mandatory topics for these questions instead of their optional topics. Candidates who selected mandatory topics were not awarded any marks as both mandatory topics were assessed elsewhere in the paper.

A few candidates selected a social optional topic for Q1 (d) and were allocated the marks in Q3 (a). The few candidates who selected an individual optional topic in Q3 (a) were allocated the marks in Q1 (d).

Component 2: Assignment

Overall, candidates performed very well in the Assignment. The majority of candidates submitted well-structured Assignments and chose appropriate topics. However some candidates' aim and hypothesis/hypotheses for the study did not always match the procedure. Some of the plans did not adhere to British Psychological Society (BPS) ethical guidelines.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Candidates performed particularly well in Q2 *Social Behaviour: Conformity*. This question required candidates to apply their knowledge and understanding of conformity to an unfamiliar scenario. This demonstrated higher-order thinking skills and a deep understanding of the topic rather than recall of information.

Candidates also performed very well in Q1 (c): *Explain sleep and dreams using the psychoanalytic approach. Refer to research evidence in your answer*. Candidates were able to use the approach to explain the topic and did not simply state everything they knew about the approach.

Component 2: Assignment

Overall candidates performed well in the Assignment. The vast majority of candidates followed the guidance set by SQA. Although SQA did not provide a template, most candidates did present the plan according to the A–G sections. Most candidates selected appropriate topics for their plans.

Candidates were able to describe the aim of their research (C) and to give appropriate hypotheses (D).

Section 4: Areas in which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Q1 (b): *Explain one strength and one weakness of using the biological approach when studying sleep and dreams.* This question was able to differentiate the A/B from the C grade candidates. The weaker candidates tended to explain one strength and one weakness of the approach and did not apply it to sleep and dreams. Others did not appear to have a sufficient grasp of the biological approach.

Component 2: Assignment

Section B: Almost all candidates referred to two relevant research studies as required. However, many candidates described the method/procedure of the studies in detail and did not gain high marks. Candidates will gain more marks if they show how the research contributes to an explanation of the topic.

Section E: Some candidates were not specific about the research method they were planning to use, eg they did not always specify if the experiment was a laboratory, field or natural. Candidates often gave a good description of the sample/sampling technique but they are also required to comment on the suitability of the sampling technique.

Ethics: Candidates were planning to conduct unethical studies, eg depriving participants of sleep, replicating Asch and Sherif's unethical studies, filming participants who were conforming, standing close to people to make them feel uncomfortable. Such candidates were unable to access the 4 marks within the ethics section.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

Centres are to be commended for delivering the Course to such a high level. This was reflected in the quality of candidates' responses.

It is apparent that the majority of candidates were able to differentiate between optional and mandatory topics, and between social and individual topics. Centres are advised to continue using the terms (mandatory, optional, individual social) that are used in the question paper to minimise the risk of confusion.

For National 5 it may be advisable to teach the approaches only in relation to the selected topics to ensure that candidates are not tempted to provide long descriptions of the approaches or their strengths and weaknesses without applying them to the topics.

Component 2: Assignment

Centres may consider providing candidates with a template to complete all sections of the research plan.

The Detailed Marking Instructions are an essential resource when supporting candidates, it is here, for example, that it is made explicit that in Section E candidates are required to comment on the *suitability* of the sampling technique.

If the research plan could potentially lead to psychological/physical harm, candidates cannot be awarded any of the 4 marks available for ethics. It is imperative that National 5 psychology students adhere to the BPS principles when planning their research. The Association for the Teaching of Psychology Scotland (ATPS) recently issued guidelines for pre-tertiary students conducting research. This is to protect the candidates and their participants, to prepare those who will go on to study psychology further and to develop the candidates' psychological literacy skills. The assessor is required to ensure that the candidates protect the welfare, dignity and rights of all participants. Centres may wish to set up an ethics committee (depending on the centre, this could consist of other Social Science lecturers, HN Social Science students, Higher Psychology candidates or peers who are also studying National 5 Psychology).

Centres are reminded that they should exercise their professional responsibility when supporting candidates. The Assignment has been set to assess candidates' skills in selecting, organising and interpreting information throughout the research process. If centres provide too much support, candidates will not get the opportunity to develop the skills they require to progress onto an appropriate level of study.

Acceptable support:

- ◆ The assessor should approve candidates' selection of a topic before the candidate starts the task — to ensure that appropriate resources can be accessed and adhere to BPS guidelines.
- ◆ The assessor should give advice on how to write the plan.
- ◆ The assessor should ensure the candidate understands the requirements of each stage of the task before the candidates independently start the task.
- ◆ The assessor should put in place processes for monitoring progress.
- ◆ The assessor may provide a range of resources from which the candidate can select information that they wish to use in their assignment.

Acceptable support does not include providing detailed feedback on drafts, including suggesting a possible mark.

Further Information

In 2014 grade boundaries were increased as the overall Course assessment was less demanding than intended. For 2015 the intention was to align assessments with notional values of 50% for a grade C and 70% for a grade A.

However, the demand within the assignment had not been increased sufficiently, and so the grade boundaries have been adjusted accordingly.

The Marking Instructions and documentation for the Coursework are to be reviewed / revised for clarity and to realign the marks with the skills expected at SCQF level 5. This work will take place for implementation in the academic year 2015–16.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	84
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	354
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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 - 80				
A	34.2%	34.2%	121	61
B	16.7%	50.8%	59	54
C	13.0%	63.8%	46	47
D	6.8%	70.6%	24	43
No award	29.4%	-	104	-

In 2014 grade boundaries were increased as the assessment was less demanding than intended. For 2015 the intention was to align assessments with notional values of 50% for a grade C and 70% for a grade A.

However, the demand has not been increased sufficiently and so the grade boundaries have been adjusted accordingly. The C grade boundary was raised by 7 marks to 47, the A grade boundary by 5 marks to 61 and the upper A by 2 marks to 70.