



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Psychology
Level	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

There was a slight increase in candidates this year (53) and four new centres. Overall, performance in the exam increased slightly compared to last year. This might indicate that centres are now becoming accustomed to the revised syllabus and question structure in Section C. Candidates generally continued to demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the topics and indeed analysis and evaluation skills, which have often proved problematic in the past. They also demonstrated a clear awareness of the need to use research evidence — both classic and contemporary studies, although the classic studies still predominated.

Research Investigation

The average mark was slightly lower than last year, but still consistent with those of previous years. Most centres followed the research briefs provided, allowing candidates to maximise their marks. A few centres deviated from the briefs resulting in the candidates suffering penalties in their marks.

It was noted by Markers that candidate submissions from a few centres presented rather formulaic reports, which although they were successful in obtaining marks, did not always indicate a clear understanding by the candidate.

The majority of candidates continued to follow the required report format and use appropriate terminology, but there were a few who did not. Occasionally the present tense was used, as was the first person.

Presentation was generally very good, although often the results seemed to find their way into the appendices. Occasionally raw data and calculations were missing.

Centres are reminded to adhere to the British Psychological Society's Ethical guidelines (see [SQA's Higher Psychology web page](#)). Observing ethical issues in research is a mandatory feature of the Investigating Behaviour Unit in Higher Psychology and candidates must be made aware of these guidelines.

Some introductions were rather brief and the research was not fully explained — often, candidates merely stated what was provided on the brief. Method sections sometimes lacked detail.

In the Discussion section, evaluation continued to be generic, eg suggesting larger samples should be used. Those candidates who were more specific, eg referring to problems with the actual design used, gained better marks. Suggestions for future research were often lacking, again simply suggesting using a larger sample rather than something more meaningful and related to furthering the research conducted.

Although referencing seems to be improving, there were still candidates who included a bibliography or simply 'SQA handouts'.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Section A — generally the research questions were well done.

Section B — continues to produce some of the higher marks for candidates.

Section C — some candidates actually achieved full marks for their essays, or close to full marks.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Question A2(a) on Memory seemed to cause a little confusion for some candidates but did not appear to affect the overall marks attained for this question.

Question C3 on Conformity generated responses which gave a basic account of the Asch study, rather than addressing the **factors** as required in the question. Candidates should be prepared for all mandatory content in the topic.

Question C4 on Atypical Behaviour seemed to pose problems for some candidates who confused **approaches** with **therapies**. These different aspects are something that should be emphasised when preparing candidates for the exam.

Common-sense-type answers seemed to be less frequent this year, but that may be due to the actual questions in the paper providing less opportunity for candidates to include these responses.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Centres must follow the relevant Arrangements documents and adhere to the mandatory content of each Unit and topic. Questions can be asked on any aspect of mandatory content. Course Assessment Specification, Specimen Question Paper and past papers and their marking instructions are also useful in preparing candidates for the external assessment.

It can be very helpful for candidates to attempt past papers, especially essay questions, to get feedback on their performance.

Candidates should be encouraged to use appropriate terminology — the words ‘prove’ and ‘significant’ are still quite commonly found in exam responses and the Research Investigation.

Centres should ensure that the Research Investigation briefs are adhered to, to enable candidates to maximise their marks. Candidates should be encouraged to elaborate on the points they make, especially in the discussion section. 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 by such facilitation, as well as better marks. This is likely to produce less formulaic reports. Centres must adhere to ethical considerations.

Centres should also be aware that when submitting appeals evidence which uses only a two-part prelim plus a NAB, full Course coverage must be demonstrated. Therefore, in Section A and C, the two areas of choice must be evidenced.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	3,293
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	3,517
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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	26.5%	26.5%	933	85
B	20.1%	46.6%	707	72
C	18.7%	65.4%	659	60
D	6.8%	72.2%	240	54
No award	27.8%	100.0%	978	-

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.