



Course report 2019

Subject	Psychology
Level	National 5

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Markers and teachers and lecturers indicated that the assessment was fair in terms of course coverage and level of demand. The majority of responses were at the expected level for knowledge and understanding of psychological concepts and theories, application of knowledge, and the use of terminology. Candidates demonstrated that they had developed the ability to use thinking skills when explaining and applying their knowledge of psychology.

The assignment and the question paper were effective in differentiating between A, B, C and D candidates. Some candidates attained full marks, but some others attained very low marks, suggesting that some candidates entered for the course were not adequately prepared, or were not yet ready, to study Psychology at National 5 level.

Question paper

In section 1 all candidates are required to answer question 1 (sleep and dreams). Candidates are then required to choose between question 2 (personality) or question 3 (phobias). The majority of candidates answered question 3.

In section 2 all candidates are required to answer question 4 (conformity). Candidates are then required to choose between question 5 (altruism) and question 6 (non-verbal communication). The majority of candidates chose to answer question 6.

Assignment

The assignment requires candidates to produce a report based on the background research of a topic in psychology, and a research plan for further research on this topic.

They choose a topic, conduct a literature review of other research into this topic, then plan a piece of research of their own. Candidates are not required to carry out the research for this assignment. The assignment is worth 30 marks, which is 30% of the course assessment.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Candidates performed well in questions 1 (a) (ii), 3 (c) (ii) and 4 (d) (ii). These questions asked candidates to explain the strengths and weaknesses of research studies. Historically, National 5 candidates have not performed well in these questions and therefore there has been a notable improvement in this session. Candidates also performed well in questions 5 (b) and 6 (b) where candidates were required to calculate the mean.

Overall candidates performed better in the mandatory topics of sleep and dreams (question 1) and conformity (question 4). They performed particularly well in question 4 (d) where they were asked to describe the Asch study, and in question 4 (c) where they were required to apply their knowledge of conformity to explain the behaviour in an unseen scenario.

Assignment

It was evident that the majority of candidates had been given the opportunity for personalisation regarding their choice of topic to investigate. Overall, candidates were not following a formulaic response, indicating that their assignments were their own work. Candidates submitted reports in the appropriate format and demonstrated that they had developed basic research skills.

Candidates performed well in section C (presenting an appropriate aim) and in section D (presenting an appropriate hypothesis). Candidates were also able to describe two relevant research studies in section B. It was encouraging to see that candidates were describing up-to-date research studies.

Candidates who submitted ethical plans were able to explain how they would avoid breaching ethical guidelines. It was encouraging to see that many candidates were able to keep this specific to their research rather than explaining ethical considerations generically.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

In general, candidates found questions 2 (b), 3 (c), 5 (d) and 6 (c) demanding. In these questions candidates were asked to describe a research study on a specific aspect of the topic. For example:

- ◆ 2 (b) — a study on the biological causes of anti-social personality disorder (APD)
- ◆ 3 (c) — a study on the genetic inheritance of phobias
- ◆ 5 (d) — a study on the kin-selection theory of altruism
- ◆ 6 (c) — a study relating to nurture in non-verbal communication (NVC)

It was apparent in most cases that candidates had learnt the studies, but some selected the wrong study to describe, for example:

- ◆ 2 (b) — a study on the situational causes
- ◆ 3 (c) — a study on the two-process model

- ◆ 5 (d) — a study on the empathy–altruism theory
- ◆ 6 (c) — a study relating to nurture

Candidates who selected the correct study generally did well in describing the aim, method/procedure, and results.

Many of the candidates who selected ‘personality’ did not perform well in question 2 (d) where they were asked to explain Eysenck’s type theory of personality, referring to the EPQ-r (Eysenck Personality Questionnaire — revised) in their answer. Candidates tended to explain the EPQ-r only, neglecting to explain the theory, and therefore could not access all of the marks available.

Although candidates did well overall in question 4 (conformity) they did not perform well in question 4 (a) where they were asked to describe one situational factor in conformity. Candidates tended to describe a situation in which conformity occurs rather than describing a situational factor.

Candidates did not perform well in question 6 (a) where they were asked to describe one status difference in NVC.

Assignment

A small percentage of candidates were unable to access the 4 marks for ethics because they had submitted a plan that proposed an unethical study. Unethical plans submitted by candidates included:

- ◆ using confederates in conformity studies
- ◆ using discussion in the replication of Jenness and other conformity studies
- ◆ re-enacting the Asch study
- ◆ asking participants to use/not use a night time filter on devices
- ◆ asking participants to use/not use devices before going to bed
- ◆ asking participants to consume/not consume caffeine before going to bed
- ◆ depriving participants of sleep
- ◆ using members of the public as participants
- ◆ offering rewards for participation in studies
- ◆ asking participants if they experienced depression
- ◆ using under 16s as participants

Many candidates did not outline why their area of study was of psychological importance. Additionally, many candidates did not attain full marks for section B as they did not make a clear link between appropriate psychological concepts or theories and research evidence.

In section E, some candidates identified the research method, but did not describe it. Some candidates did not justify their choice of sampling method, or why it was suitable. Some candidates did not identify the type of data collected.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Teachers and lecturers are advised that when teaching the research studies for the optional topics of phobias (personality, altruism and NVC), they should be referring to the studies as being:

- ◆ a study on the biological **or** situational causes of APD (personality)
- ◆ a study on the two-process model **or** genetic inheritance of phobias (phobias)
- ◆ a study on the kin-selection theory **or** the empathy–altruism theory of altruism (altruism)
- ◆ a study relating to nature **or** nurture in non-verbal communication (NVC)

This should be reinforced in handouts, classroom tests, prelims and in classroom delivery to avoid candidates describing the wrong studies. Teachers and lecturers are also advised to guide candidates to name the researcher(s) if asked to describe a study in future assessments. Teachers and lecturers are advised to follow the course specification closely and to make sure that they, and candidates, are familiar with the specimen question paper and past papers.

It was apparent that some of the candidates who were entered for the course assessment were not adequately prepared, or were not yet ready, to study Psychology at National 5 level. Centres are advised to closely monitor candidate progress throughout delivery of the course to ensure candidates entered for the exam are ready for the demands of the external assessment.

Centres should continue to develop skills, as candidates did well in applying their knowledge and in explaining strengths and/or weaknesses, when required.

Assignment

Centres are reminded that research plans must adhere to ethical guidelines. SQA coursework documentation stresses the importance of ensuring that the research planned for the National 5 assignment is ethical and complies with The British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct. Centres are advised to consult the Association for the Teaching of Psychology (ATP) *Guide to Ethics for Teachers and Students of Psychology at Pre-Degree Level*, which can be found on its website.

Centres are advised that candidates should be encouraged to follow the detailed marking instructions provided for the assignment. This clearly shows how marks are accessed.

Teachers and lecturers should continue to encourage candidates to use up-to-date relevant research studies in their plans. This is motivating for candidates, brings the topic alive, and will assist in preparing candidates to progress to Higher Psychology level.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	775
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Number of resulted entries in 2019	992
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	24.5%	24.5%	243	70
B	16.0%	40.5%	159	60
C	17.4%	58.0%	173	50
D	16.2%	74.2%	161	40
No award	25.8%	-	256	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.