



## External Assessment Report 2015

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 decrease of approximately 300 candidates this year due to some centres moving to the new Higher. There were several new centres, although most of these were due to merged colleges.

The distribution of marks would suggest that, in its final year, the Course content is fully embedded. The percentage of candidates who achieved this year was slightly lower than last year, but still consistent with previous years.

As before, candidates demonstrated 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. In the case of the Atypical Behaviour question, however, many candidates seemed to lack knowledge of the Definitions and simply wrote about Approaches or Therapies. As always, candidates should be encouraged to include research evidence, as sometimes this was lacking.

### Research Investigation

The average mark was very slightly lower than last year's. This could be partially due to many candidates finding it difficult to fully operationalise hypotheses.

Although most centres followed the research briefs provided, allowing candidates to maximise their marks, there did seem to be several centres that deviated from the briefs significantly, resulting in some candidates being unable to access some marks. There continue to be several ethical breaches raised by markers, eg the inclusion of participants' names on consent forms etc. A few centres also used participants under the age of 16, which is against the ethical guidelines currently provided by SQA. Centres should adhere to the briefs provided and also refer to the Ethical Guidelines provided on the SQA website.

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.

Yet again, some candidates submitted their Log Books, which are part of the Investigating Behaviour Unit NAB evidence. This is not required for external assessment.

Presentation was generally good again, but still many candidates included their results in the appendices, and raw data and calculations. On some occasions appendices which were required to replicate the research were missing.

Formulating hypotheses seemed to cause many candidates problems this year.

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.

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 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 A – all options produced some high marks for candidates, again demonstrating that the Course content is now embedded.

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

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

Section B – some responses were quite poor, noticeably the hypothesis question. Many candidates seemed to find describing correlation very difficult.

Question C4 – the essay on the Definitions of Atypical Behaviour was often answered extremely well, but as previously mentioned, many candidates wrote about Approaches and Therapies instead of Definitions.

Question C5 – the essay on Theories of Intelligence was generally answered well, although some candidates simply explained the Nature-Nurture debate instead of referring to named theories.

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

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

This is the last year of this Higher Course, but some of the points made below may be useful when teaching the New Higher also. Centres should also review the 2015 Course Report for New Higher Psychology which provides further guidance.

Centres should follow the relevant documents — ie Course Specification, Course Assessment Specification etc.

In the RI, 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, again to maximise their marks.

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

Specimen/past papers and their marking instructions are 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, as the 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 2014	3479
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	3175
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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	31.3%	31.3%	993	87
B	18.8%	50.1%	597	74
C	17.0%	67.1%	541	62
D	6.4%	73.5%	202	56
No award	26.5%	-	842	-

The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

## 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.