Course Report 2015

Subject	Psychology
Level	Higher

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

The question paper sampled across one mandatory topic and both optional topics, with broad questions in sections 2 and 3 enabling choice between theories, concepts and approaches.

Component 2: Assignment

Briefs provided by SQA provided the opportunity for candidates to be creative in the design of this assignment. However, in some cases candidates over-complicated their designs with multiple research variables under investigation.

Some candidates produced rather 'formulaic' assignments with apparent similarities within cohorts. While candidates require support with design, formatting and structure this should be minimal to enable candidates to demonstrate their individuality and complete their assignment independently.

There were a number of assignments with ethical breaches relating to confidentiality of participants, individual informed consent, use of participants under the age of sixteen and potentially risky situations for participants and candidates. Centres are required to ensure candidates follow the British Psychology Society's Ethical Guidelines while planning, carrying out and writing their assignment.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

Overall, candidates appeared to be well prepared to answer questions from both the mandatory and optional topics. While candidates demonstrated good skills in description and evaluation, they found the command word 'Analyse' more challenging.

Component 2: Assignment

Generally, candidates appeared to be well prepared for the assignment, with a high number of candidates producing well-structured creative assignments.

Overall, candidates followed an appropriate format. However, there were a number of candidates who included an 'abstract', which is not a requirement of this assignment and is not awarded any marks.

Candidates demonstrated a good use of terminology overall, although there were some candidates incorrectly using the terms 'relationship,' 'prove' and 'significance'.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Candidates appeared to be well prepared for section 1: research, demonstrating good knowledge of the British Psychology Society's Ethical Guidelines.

In Section 3: Social Behaviour, candidates demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of their chosen optional topic and in particular made good reference to appropriate research within their responses.

Component 2: Assignment

Some candidates demonstrated a good level of creativity in their design of the assignment, responding well to the open briefs provided by SQA.

Candidates demonstrated clear strengths in the discussion section of the assignment and, in particular, the evaluation of their primary research.

Section 4: Areas in which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Section 1: Research Question 1 (c), a large number of candidates explained non-representative sampling methods instead of representative sampling methods.

Section 2: Individual Behaviour Question 2 (b). While some candidates were able to provide insightful responses to this question, others found this more challenging due to the wording or expectation of this question.

Section 3: Social Behaviour Question 3 (a). A large number of candidates evaluated a research study relating to conformity instead of analysing a research study. Candidates who related their evaluation to features, results and/or conclusion of the research study were able to access more marks in this question. Many candidates appeared unprepared to meet the demands of the command word 'Analyse'.

Component 2: Assignment

Some candidates appeared to find the open briefs provided by SQA to be challenging, producing over-complicated designs with multiple research variables. The 'Introduction' Section appeared to be challenging for some candidates. Many candidates did not clearly show the link between previous research described and the formulation of their aim and research hypothesis. Candidates should demonstrate how previous research has informed the design of their research.

Methods sections of a large number of assignments were poorly written with candidates listing materials and procedures instead of describing with enough detail to enable replication.

While results' sections generally demonstrated clear ability in displaying of results and analysing data, some candidates appeared to find interpreting results in relation to their research hypothesis demanding.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question Paper

Candidates should be encouraged to prepare for the question paper through the use of specimen/past papers. This can be very useful for candidates enabling them to become more familiar with the structure of the paper, the demand of the command words used and receive feedback on their performance and areas for development. A minority of candidates appeared to confuse the optional topics for the Individual Behaviour and Social Behaviour Sections. Centres should ensure candidates are clear what optional topics are being studied for each section.

Centres are encouraged to continue to support candidates with structuring their responses and with the depth of knowledge, skills and understanding required to fully demonstrate their ability.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidates should be encouraged to avoid the use of inappropriate terminology such as 'prove' and 'significance' unless inferential statistics have been appropriately applied, and 'relationship' unless a correlational research design has been used.

When designing their assignments, candidates should be appropriately supported by centres to ensure British Psychological Society's ethical guidelines are followed throughout the process. Where assignments breach ethical guidelines, candidates are unable to access full marks for this section.

Candidates should also be appropriately supported in ensuring the number of variables under investigation are relevant to the candidate's assignment and are not over-complicated.

Further Information

Question 2b was intended to be accessible to all candidates. However, due to the relationship with the Course content it proved more difficult than intended. A 2-mark decrease was therefore applied to all boundaries. The Assignment was less demanding than intended and an increase of 3 marks was therefore applied.

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 6. This work will take place for implementation in the academic year 2015–16.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0

Number of resulted entries in 2015	497

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -100				
A	22.9%	22.9%	114	71
B	19.1%	42.1%	95	61
C	23.5%	65.6%	117	51
D	6.4%	72.0%	32	46
No award	28.0%	-	139	-

Question 2b was intended to be accessible to all candidates; however due to the relationship with the Course content it proved more difficult than intended. An adjustment of a 2 mark decrease was applied to all boundaries. However, the Assignment was less demanding than intended and an increase of 3 marks was applied, resulting in a C boundary of 51, A boundary of 71 and upper A boundary of 86.

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.