



## Course Report 2017 – External Assessment

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 assessment. 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 documents and marking instructions.

# **Section 1: Comments on the assessment**

## **Summary of the course assessment**

### **Component 1: question paper**

Candidates were examined on both mandatory topics and the optional topic from the Individual Behaviour Unit. Across these three topics, they were assessed on their knowledge and understanding of approaches, theories/concepts and research studies. They were instructed to describe, explain and apply their knowledge. The question paper had 50 marks out of a total of 80 for course assessment.

Feedback from markers was positive, indicating that the question paper was fair and accessible, offering an appropriate level of challenge. Candidate responses were at the expected level in terms of knowledge and understanding of topics, application of knowledge and the use of terminology.

### **Component 2: assignment**

The assignment required candidates to use their investigation skills to plan an appropriate research study. The assignment had 30 marks out of a total of 80 for course assessment.

The assignment performed as expected. The average mark for the assignment was 18.6/30.

There were fewer issues than in previous years with regards to non-compliance with ethical guidelines. Candidates used the standard format for the plan, and used appropriate psychological terminology.

# **Section 2: Comments on candidate performance**

## **Areas in which candidates performed well**

### **Component 1: question paper**

As expected, candidates performed particularly well in the questions on research studies.

Questions 1(e), 2(c) and 3(e) provided all candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of two mandatory studies and one optional study. These questions were basic describe questions.

Overall, candidates performed very well in the whole of Question 1 on the mandatory topic of sleep and dreams. They were able to apply their knowledge and skills to answer specific questions on the topic and did not simply regurgitate knowledge. Higher-order thinking skills

were evident. Centres are to be commended for developing these skills and preparing candidates well for the question paper.

Question 1 (d): Although this was a challenging question, candidates gave very thoughtful responses. Markers were impressed that candidates did not simply describe the Little Hans study or the psychoanalytic approach but used their knowledge and skills to show how the study supports the approach.

### **Component 2: assignment**

The majority of candidates were afforded some personalisation and choice in choosing which aspect of their topics to investigate. Candidates were not following a formulaic response, indicating that it was their own work.

Centres are to be commended for providing reasonable support that allowed the candidates to select topics of interest and complete the report to the required standard.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Component 1: question paper**

A significant number of candidates answered on the wrong topic for Question 2 (Individual Behaviour: Optional Topic) and were therefore unable to access the marks available parts (a) and (b).

### **Component 2: assignment**

Some candidates were unable to access the 4 marks for ethics because they were planning unethical research studies, for example by planning to:

- ◆ include discussion when replicating the Jenness study
- ◆ ask participants sensitive questions about their mental state and self-esteem
- ◆ select participants under the age of 16
- ◆ replicate the Asch study
- ◆ approach strangers in public places

Centres are required to ensure that candidates apply the British Psychology Society (BPS) Ethical Guidelines while planning their research study. SQA has written to all centres regarding this. This letter is available on the Psychology page of the SQA website.

In Section E '*Describe a suitable research plan, including method, sampling, variables and procedures*' candidates were not accessing the full 4 marks for Method as they were not describing the method or explaining the strengths and weaknesses.

Candidates from a small number of centres submitted coursework that was very similar.

## **Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: question paper**

Candidates were very well prepared for the question paper and demonstrated their knowledge and skills. Centres are to be commended for this and advised to continue delivering the revised course with an emphasis on skills.

Centres are advised to become familiar with the new course specification, the specimen question paper and support notes for the revised course.

### **Component 2: assignment**

The assignment should give candidates an opportunity for personalisation and choice in preparing their own assignment. The assignment should not be taught as a whole-class exercise with everyone doing the same assignment. Centres should familiarise themselves with the conditions of assessment and the 'reasonable assistance' that can be provided to candidates.

Centres should pay particular attention to the detailed marking instructions to ensure that candidates have the opportunity to access all the marks available.

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the conditions of assessment for coursework were adhered to in the majority of centres, there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case. Following feedback from teachers, we have strengthened the conditions of assessment criteria for National 5 subjects and will do so for Higher and Advanced Higher. The criteria are published clearly on our website and in course materials and must be adhered to. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and equity for all candidates in all qualifications through consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases alerted to us where conditions may not have been met.

## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	631
------------------------------------	-----

Number of resulted entries in 2017	622
------------------------------------	-----

### Statistical information: Performance of candidates

#### Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	36.2%	36.2%	225	56
B	19.3%	55.5%	120	48
C	15.0%	70.4%	93	40
D	6.3%	76.7%	39	36
No award	23.3%	-	145	-

## 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.