



Course report 2023

National 5 Psychology

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. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 1,005

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 1,136

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	407	Percentage	35.8	Cumulative percentage	35.8	Minimum mark required	70
B	Number of candidates	191	Percentage	16.8	Cumulative percentage	52.6	Minimum mark required	60
C	Number of candidates	189	Percentage	16.6	Cumulative percentage	69.3	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	131	Percentage	11.5	Cumulative percentage	80.8	Minimum mark required	40
No award	Number of candidates	218	Percentage	19.2	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

The assessment performed as expected. Feedback from the marking team, teachers and lecturers indicated that the question paper was fair and accessible to all candidates, while allowing for differentiation across grades. The paper assessed content from both mandatory sections of the course: sleep and dreams, and conformity.

Question paper

In the modified question paper, each section was worth 25 marks and no optional topics were assessed.

In Section 1: Individual behaviour, 12 marks were allocated to psychoanalytic theory and Little Hans, and 13 marks to restoration theory and Dement and Kleitman. This allowed the content to be covered in a balanced way. Candidates were asked to describe, explain and apply knowledge so that a range of skills could be assessed.

In Section 2: Social behaviour, candidates were asked to describe, explain and apply their knowledge. They were asked about types of conformity, factors affecting conformity and research studies. The course content and skills were assessed in a balanced way to allow for fairness, accessibility and differentiation.

Assignment

Centres reported that the candidate instructions for sections A–F of the assignment plan were clearly presented. Centres and markers commented that the summary table for marking instructions was useful.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Candidates performed well in both sections when asked about research studies.

Section 1: Individual behaviour

Question 1(a)(i)

Candidates were asked to describe the Little Hans study. Most candidates did very well in this question.

Question 1(a)(ii)

Candidates were asked to explain one strength and one weakness of the Little Hans study. Most candidates explained a strength well, but many found it demanding to fully explain a weakness.

Question 1(c)

Candidates were asked to apply their knowledge of restoration theory to a scenario. Most candidates performed well, demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the theory.

Section 2: Social behaviour

Question 2(a)(i)

Candidates were asked to describe the method/procedure of the Mori and Arai study. Most candidates performed very well.

Question 2(c)

Candidates were asked to describe the results of the Asch study. Most were able to achieve high marks in this question.

Assignment

Most candidates followed the instructions on the assignment task provided. Many candidates planned research on the mandatory topics and some on the optional topics.

Some candidates provided contemporary research studies that were clearly linked to their aim or hypothesis. Within some centres there was a wide variety of research plans. These centres are to be commended for encouraging candidates' development of research skills and interest in the topics.

There were fewer breaches of ethical guidelines than in previous years.

Section B

Many candidates were able to make a clear link between appropriate psychological concepts or theories and research evidence to explain the topic. Some explained the concepts or theories and the research evidence but did not clearly demonstrate the link.

Section C and D

Most candidates clearly stated the aim and hypothesis of the study.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Section 1: Individual behaviour

Question 1(b)

Candidates were asked to describe the conscious and unconscious according to the psychoanalytic theory of dreams. Although most candidates could describe the unconscious, some did not describe the conscious. Some candidates did not refer to sleep in their answer.

Question 1(d)

Candidates were asked to explain one strength and one weakness of the restoration theory. Some candidates did not perform well. This question was also asked in the 2021 question paper available on the National 5 Psychology subject page.

Question 2(b)(iii)

Candidates were asked to explain how by not using confederates, Mori and Arai improved the Asch study. Many candidates did not perform well as the question was not accurately answered. Some explained how Mori and Arai improved the Asch study generally without focusing on not using confederates.

Question 2(e)

Candidates were asked to apply knowledge of minority influence to a scenario. Many candidates did not answer this well and some did not attempt this question.

Assignment

Section A

Some candidates did not outline why the area of study was of psychological importance.

Section E

Most candidates found this section to be the most demanding.

Some found it difficult to justify their choice of research method and to justify the suitability of the sampling method. Some confused opportunity, quota and random sampling methods.

Some confused experimental methods and correlation.

Some candidates still breached ethical guidelines by planning to:

- ◆ deprive participants of sleep
- ◆ use confederates in conformity studies
- ◆ use discussion in Jenness replication
- ◆ select unknown members of the public to be participants
- ◆ manipulate exposure to blue light before bed or caffeine consumption

Suspected malpractice was identified in some submissions. Centres must ensure that they adhere to the conditions of assessment as specified in the course specification and the guidance on conditions of assessment documents published on the subject page.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

In session 2023–24 candidates will be assessed on the two mandatory and two optional topics. Teachers and lecturers will be required to amend their learning, teaching, assessment and revision schedules to allow sufficient time for the consolidation of all four topics.

Centres are reminded that they should prepare candidates to answer questions on the conscious, pre-conscious, unconscious, manifest content of dreams, latent content of dreams, as well as the whole psychoanalytic theory of dreams.

Centres should prepare candidates to explain strengths and weaknesses of the restoration theory as well as strengths and weaknesses of the research studies.

Centres should continue to ensure that candidates know how to describe, explain and apply their understanding of concepts or theories to unfamiliar scenarios.

Assignment

In session 2023–24 teachers and lecturers can no longer suggest the research topic and the research method to candidates.

Centres are advised to apply professional judgement to allow for personalisation and choice while providing guidance. If candidates are given more autonomy to study an aspect of a topic that is of interest to them, they are more likely to develop creative thinking skills and to gain a deeper understanding of the research process. This will lead to a more authentic assessment of candidates' understanding of the research process and prepare them for future study.

In order to improve performance in section E of the assignment centres should ensure that candidates can explain, evaluate and compare research methods and sampling methods. These skills can be developed when teaching the research studies in the four topics.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade 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 for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty 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 on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).