



# **Course report 2025**

## **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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

# Grade boundary and statistical information

## Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 1,089

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 958

## Statistical information: performance of candidates

### Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	315	32.9	32.9	70
B	218	22.8	55.6	60
C	183	19.1	74.7	50
D	106	11.1	85.8	40
No award	136	14.2	100%	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

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

In this report:

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

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

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

## **Question paper**

The question paper performed as expected.

In the 2025 question paper the mandatory topics of Sleep and Dreams and Conformity were each worth 15 marks. The optional topics were worth 20 marks each.

As in previous years, the individual behaviour topic of phobias was more popular than the personality topic. The social behaviour topic of altruism was more popular than non-verbal communication.

## **Assignment**

The assignment performed as expected.

Most candidates used the template to submit their assignment.

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

### **Question paper**

Candidates performed slightly better in the sleep and dreams topic than in the conformity topic.

Candidate performance across all four optional questions was similar.

Most candidates performed particularly well when asked to describe research studies. Most candidates performed well when asked to calculate the mean.

Some candidates found it challenging to link research evidence to concepts and theories.

### **Question 1: Sleep and dreams**

Most candidates performed particularly well in question 1(a) where they were asked to describe the method or procedure of the Dement and Kleitman study.

Most candidates also performed well in question 1(c) where they were asked to explain one weakness of the Restoration Theory of Sleep. This question was asked in 2023 and in 2024 — there was a marked improvement in 2025.

Some candidates found question 1(b) more challenging. They were asked to use their knowledge of the Restoration Theory of Sleep to explain the possible effects of sleep deprivation. Most candidates were able to explain the theory including the functions of REM and non-REM. However, they could only be awarded half marks if they provided this explanation only and did not explain the possible effects of not getting sufficient REM/non-REM.

Some candidates found question 1(d) challenging. They were asked to explain the role of the unconscious in the psychoanalytic explanation of dreams. A few candidates explained the role of the unconscious without reference to dreams so could only be awarded a maximum of 1 mark. Some candidates explained the theory

but did not sufficiently focus on the role of the unconscious so could not be awarded full marks.

## **Question 2: Personality**

Most candidates performed particularly well in question 2(a) where they were asked to describe what was meant by personality.

Most performed well in question 2(d)(i) where they were asked to describe the aim(s) of a research study into the situational causes of anti-social personality disorder (APD). Some candidates found it more challenging to explain a weakness in question 2(d)(ii).

Most candidates performed well in question 2(e) where they were asked to calculate the mean.

The most challenging question was 2(c) where candidates were asked to explain the biological causes of APD with reference to research evidence. Many candidates described the role of the pre-frontal cortex and the amygdala but did not elaborate on how abnormalities in these parts of the brain could lead to APD. Some candidates referred to research evidence but did not link to APD.

## **Question 3: Phobias**

Most candidates performed well in question 3(a) where they were asked to describe what is meant by phobias.

Many candidates performed well in question 3(c)(i) where they were asked to describe the aim/s of a research study into the two-process model of phobias. Many candidates also performed well in question 3(c)(ii) where they were asked to explain one weakness of this study.

Some found question 3(b) challenging where they were asked to explain systematic desensitisation. Some candidates only described the stages so could only be awarded a maximum of half marks. However, some candidates were able to gain higher marks by explaining the stages with reference to in vitro, in vivo, counter-conditioning, classical conditioning principles.

Some candidates found question 3(d) challenging where they were asked to explain the role of genetic inheritance with reference to research evidence. Some candidates did not link the research evidence to genetic inheritance.

#### **Question 4: Conformity**

Most candidates performed well in question 4(a) where they were asked to explain what was meant by compliance, with reference to research evidence. Most candidates made appropriate reference to Asch. Some candidates explained how compliance is often caused by normative social influence and were awarded an additional mark for doing so.

Some candidates found question 4(b) challenging. This was an 8-mark question where candidates were required to apply their knowledge of conformity to a scenario. Most candidates gained some of the marks but did not explain or apply enough concepts to gain full marks. Some candidates did perform well and applied concepts such as compliance, normative influence, informational influence, gender and self-esteem.

Some candidates found question 4(c) challenging as they described how the procedure, sample, and ethics of the two studies differed when the question asked candidates to describe how the results of Mori and Arai's study differed from the results of Asch's study.

#### **Question 5: Altruism**

Question 5(a): most candidates were able to describe diffusion of responsibility; however, a few candidates did not refer to helping behaviour in their response so could not be awarded the full 2 marks.

Question 5(b): most candidates were able to explain cultural differences in altruism; however, a few candidates did not explain how the cultural differences could lead to more or less altruism so could not gain the full 4 marks. Most candidates did explain collectivist and individualistic cultures but a few candidates explained rural and urban differences and religious differences which are equally valid.

Question 5(e): some candidates found this question to be challenging. They were asked to explain the empathy-altruism theory of altruism with reference to research evidence. Some candidates did not fully explain what was meant by empathy. Some candidates did not link the research evidence to the theory but only gave a description of the research studies.

### **Question 6: Non-verbal communication**

Most candidates performed well in question 6(a) when asked to describe status differences and in question 6(b) when asked to describe gender differences in non-verbal communication (NVC).

Some candidates found question 6(c) more challenging. They were asked to explain cultural differences in NVC with reference to research evidence. Some candidates described the research studies but did not directly link the findings to cultural differences.

Most candidates were able to describe the method and procedure of a research study relating to nature in NVC for question 6(d)(i), however many found it more challenging to explain how the results of the study support the contribution of nature to NVC for question 6(d)(ii). Some candidates just described the results but did not explain how they supported nature.

### **Assignment**

Most candidates performed well in these areas:

- describing their topic
- describing the research studies
- describing the aim
- explaining a strength and weakness of their research method
- describing research variables
- describing how to avoid ethical breaches



Many candidates found it challenging to:

- link the research studies to the concepts or theories
- write a hypothesis
- justify the choice of method with regard to its suitability

Section A: Most candidates described the behaviour associated with their topic but did not outline why their area of study was of psychological importance, therefore they could only be awarded 1 mark.

Section B: Most candidates described appropriate studies to gain 4 marks but many candidates found it challenging to link the studies to concepts or theories in order to gain the other 4 available marks. Some candidates were able to do this by explaining the conclusions of the studies with reference to relevant theories or concepts.

Some candidates were not awarded the mark for terminology and basic references as they did not reference both studies.

Section C: Most candidates were awarded the mark for the aim.

Section D: Many candidates did not gain the full 2 marks for the hypothesis. To do so, the two conditions of the Independent Variable (IV) should be clear and the Dependent Variable (DV) operationalised, if experimental.

Section E: Some candidates confused experimental methods with correlational designs. Some candidates found it challenging to justify their choice of method with regard to suitability. Some candidates compared their choice of method with another method which attracted the justification mark. Most candidates could explain strengths and weaknesses of their chosen method.

Some candidates confused volunteer sampling with opportunity sampling. Many compared their sampling method with another sampling method which gained marks for justification.

Most candidates were able to describe variables although a few did not give the two conditions of the IV so could not get that mark.

Most candidates were awarded the procedure mark. However, candidates could not get this mark if the procedure was unethical or if the consent and debrief was not included as part of the procedure.

Section F: Most candidates performed well in this section and could describe how they avoided breaching at least two of the ethical standards.

There were however more ethical breaches than in previous years, for example candidates were planning to:

- use hidden cameras
- use confederates
- manipulate caffeine consumption, blue light exposure, social media usage or diet
- select strangers as participants
- use discussion in Jenness replication
- deprive participants of sleep
- use under 16s as participants
- offer cash as an incentive to participate in study
- watch participants sleep
- force eye contact with strangers
- ask participants sensitive questions about allergies, religion, sexuality, dream content

# Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

## Question paper

The course should be delivered in a way that links the different aspects of each topic in order to develop the skills to answer new questions. To prepare for future assessments it is important that candidates understand how research evidence supports concepts and theory and know how to express this in an answer.

Some examples of links are provided below.

### Sleep and dreams

- REM/non-REM and restoration theory
- psychoanalytic theory and Little Hans

### Personality

- Eysenck's theory and EPQ-r (Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-revised)
- situational causes of APD and related research study
- biological causes of APD and related research study

### Phobias

- the two-process model of phobias and related research study
- the genetic inheritance of phobias and related research study

### Conformity

- normative social influence and Asch or Mori and Arai
- individual and cultural factors and Mori and Arai

- situational factors and Asch

### Altruism

- kin-selection theory of altruism and related research study
- empathy-altruism theory of altruism and related research study

### Non-verbal communication

- The role of nature in NVC or universal types of NVC and related research study
- The role of nurture in NVC or cultural differences, gender differences, status differences, gender differences and related research study

## Assignment

It is important that centres dedicate sufficient time in their learning and teaching schedule to teach the knowledge and skills candidates will need to write their plan. This could be integrated with the teaching of the research studies in the mandatory and optional topics, for example Asch could be used to teach laboratory experiments, variables, procedure, volunteer sampling, or ethics.

Teachers and lecturers could hold a creative thinking session before starting a new topic. They could help candidates think of the type of questions that may come up in the topic, for example 'Do boys or girls conform more?'. Then the teacher or lecturer could convert these questions into testable hypotheses to allow candidates to practise.

Teachers and lecturers could ask candidates to work in groups to design a study to test one of these hypotheses. One group of candidates should be instructed to pretend there are no ethical principles. Another group of candidates could act as the ethics committee and suggest ways the study can be altered to avoid breaching ethical guidelines.

Before they start their research plan, candidates should be encouraged to get their research proposal approved by their teacher or lecturer to ensure it is both ethical and practical.

# Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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, we hold 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 our 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. We 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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).