

# Course report 2026

## National 5 Psychology, SCQF level 5

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

# Statistical and grade boundary information

## Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 958

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 1,150

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

| Course award | Number of candidates | Percentage | Cumulative percentage | Minimum mark required |
|--------------|----------------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| A            | 354                  | 30.8       | 30.8                  | 70                    |
| B            | 229                  | 19.9       | 50.7                  | 60                    |
| C            | 169                  | 14.7       | 65.4                  | 50                    |
| D            | 160                  | 13.9       | 79.3                  | 40                    |
| No award     | 238                  | 20.7       | 100                   | Not applicable        |

We've not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

## **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's 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 make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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](#).

# **How the course assessment performed**

## **Question paper**

The question paper performed as intended. There was appropriate differentiation between candidates. Candidates performed better in the individual behaviour topics compared to the social behaviour topics. There was parity across the optional topics in each section.

## **Assignment**

The assignment performed as intended. There was appropriate differentiation between candidates in sections B and G (explaining features of the topic with reference to psychological research evidence and providing basic references), D (giving a hypothesis) and E (describing a suitable plan, including method, sampling, variables and procedure).

Most candidates appropriately structured their plan using the template provided by Qualifications Scotland. The candidates clearly identified sections A-F.

# **How candidates performed**

## **Areas where candidates performed well**

### **Question paper**

#### **Sleep and dreams**

Most candidates gained high marks in questions 1(a) and (b)(i) — describe REM and nREM sleep and describe the aims of the Dement and Kleitman (1957) study.

#### **Personality**

Most candidates gained high marks in questions 2(a) and 2(b) — describe personality and psychoticism.

#### **Phobias**

Most candidates gained high marks in questions 3(a) and 3(b) — describe phobias and the characteristics of agoraphobia.

#### **Conformity**

Most candidates gained high marks in question 4(c)(i) — describe the aims of the Mori and Arai study.

### **Assignment**

Section A: Many candidates gained all 2 marks. Many candidates correctly outlined why their area of study is of psychological importance, for example it is important to study the effect of caffeine on sleep as caffeine may prevent someone from falling asleep and could lead to sleep deprivation which could affect physiological and psychological well-being.

Section C: Most candidates gained 1 mark for describing an aim.

Section F: Many candidates gained all 4 marks for describing ethical issues and ways of addressing these. Most candidates kept the issues relevant to their study.

Some candidates did not gain all 4 marks as they did not describe how they would avoid breaching British Psychological Society (BPS) ethical guidelines.

## **Areas where candidates did not perform well**

### **Question paper**

#### **Sleep and dreams**

Many candidates did not gain full marks in question 1(c) because they did not fully explain one strength of restoration theory. Many candidates described supporting research evidence but did not explain how that evidence was a strength of the theory.

Many candidates did not gain full marks for question 1(d). Most candidates explained the psychoanalytic theory but many candidates did not relate it to dreams and many did not apply their knowledge to explain the scenario.

#### **Personality**

Many candidates did not gain the full marks for questions 2(c) and 2(d). They did not fully explain one strength and one weakness of Eysenck's type theory of personality. Many candidates identified a strength and a weakness but did not explain why these were strengths and weaknesses. Many candidates explained biological causes of anti-social personality disorder (APD) but did not link the explanation to research evidence.

#### **Phobias**

Many candidates did not gain full marks for questions 3(c) and 3(d). Many candidates explained the role of genetic inheritance in the development of phobias but did not link their explanation to research evidence.

#### **Conformity**

Many candidates explained majority influence instead of minority influence in question 4(a). In question 4(b) many candidates explained informational social

influence and internalisation. They did not provide examples or an explanation of how ISI may lead to internalisation so did not gain full marks.

### **Altruism**

Many candidates did not gain full marks in question 5(b) because they did not link research evidence to the empathy-altruism theory. Some candidates did not attempt question 5(c)(i) or (ii).

### **Non-verbal communication**

Many candidates did not gain full marks in question 6(b) because they did not link research evidence to the contribution of nature. Many candidates described the research evidence but did not link to nature. Some candidates did not attempt question 6(c)(i) or (ii).

### **Assignment**

Section B: Many candidates gained marks for explaining relevant research studies. Many candidates did not gain full marks because they did not make clear links between the research evidence and psychological concepts and theories.

Section D: Many candidates did not gain the full 2 marks because they did not operationalise the hypothesis. They did not clearly express the variables.

Section E: Many candidates accurately described their chosen research method and sampling method. Some candidates correctly described quasi experiments. Most candidates did not gain full marks as they did not justify the methods or give information about suitability. Candidates who gained full marks in this section compared the chosen research or sampling methods to other methods to justify their choice. They also explained with reference to their own study why their chosen research or sampling methods were suitable.

Section F: Most candidates used appropriate terminology. Many candidates did not gain the reference mark as they did not give references for the two research studies in Section B. Many candidates used hyperlinks which did not include the name of the researcher and/or study.

There were fewer ethical breaches than last year. Some candidates did not gain the procedure mark as they breached ethical guidelines by planning to:

- use confederates
- use discussion in a Jenness replication
- ask participants to give estimates aloud in a Jenness replication
- ask sensitive questions, for example about mental health, medication, sexuality, stress levels, happiness levels
- use members of the general public as participants
- use participants under 16 years old
- deprive participants of sleep
- manipulate behaviour, for example caffeine consumption, blue light exposure
- estimate a teacher's age

# Preparing candidates for assessment

## Question paper

You should encourage candidates to answer past paper questions under timed conditions as some candidates did not attempt the last questions for altruism or non-verbal communication.

You should support candidates to understand the difference between describe and explain, for example when explaining strengths and weaknesses they could use P.E.E (**P**oint **E**vidence **E**xplain).

You should give equal attention to teaching each topic. Mark allocation varies from year to year. Either mandatory or optional topics can be worth 20 or 15 marks.

You should link theories and concepts to research evidence to give candidates a better understanding of the topics.

## Assignment

You should instruct candidates to submit a research proposal so that you can check that their intended research study is ethical. You could set a task where the rest of the class are the ethics committee and can determine if proposals are ethical.

You should encourage candidates to practise devising hypotheses. You could give the candidates research questions and instruct them to write hypotheses. You could describe the aims, method or procedure and results of relevant research studies and instruct them to write hypotheses.

When teaching research studies you should discuss why the researchers used the specific research and sampling methods. You could discuss if any other research and sampling methods would be suitable.