



## Course Report 2016

Subject	Psychology
Level	Higher

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 examinations. 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 and marking instructions for the examination.

## Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

### Component 1: Question paper

The question paper sampled mandatory content across the three sections of the paper, providing candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate a range of skills, including describe, explain, evaluate and analyse.

The question paper performed as expected providing a fair and accessible paper for all candidates to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they had acquired across the breadth of the course.

### Component 2: Assignment

The assignment provided learners an opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ use of research skills to generate, select, organise, interpret, analyse and evaluate information in psychology
- ◆ use of communication skills to present information, including a report on psychological research

Briefs provided by SQA provided the opportunity for candidates to be creative in the design of this assignment.

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 apply the British Psychology Society (BPS) Ethical Guidelines while planning, carrying out and writing their assignment.

## Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

### Summary of Candidate Performance

#### Component 1: Question paper

Overall, candidates appeared to be well prepared to answer questions in sections one and two of the question paper, although they did appear to find question 1a challenging. While candidates demonstrated good skills in description, evaluation, and analysis, they found section three of the question paper more challenging — specifically distinguishing between strategies for resisting social pressure and factors affecting conformity.

#### Component 2: Assignment

Generally, candidates who clearly followed the current guidelines performed well in the assignment. This was not always evident — some candidates included an abstract which attracts no marks, and many omitted details of how ethical issues relevant to their research were addressed in the methods sections of the assignment. Candidates on the whole were

able to discuss previous research and theories/concepts relevant to their primary research, which enabled them to set the scene for their research and demonstrate how they had used their understanding to inform the design of their research.

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

### **Component 1: Question paper**

Candidates appeared to be well prepared for section 1: research, demonstrating good analysis skills within question 1d. Candidates were able to identify the parts (results of the study), the relationship between the parts (between the results of both conditions) and the relationship to the whole (the outcome or conclusion of the study).

Section 2: Individual Behaviour: candidates demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of the mandatory topic. Candidates overall were able to demonstrate good knowledge of the Cognitive approach, though for some candidates this was more descriptive of the approach rather than using the approach to explain the topic. Candidates were able to demonstrate good knowledge of relevant research for the topic of Sleep, Dreams and Sleep Disorders.

### **Component 2: Assignment**

Overall, candidates produced clear, well-written reports, with detailed Introduction sections and good evaluation in the discussion section. Candidates were able to draw on knowledge and understanding from course content to inform the design and implementation of their research.

Candidates were also able to combine their knowledge and understanding of the Research unit with relevant knowledge from Social Behaviour and Individual behaviour to select appropriate methods of research and sampling. Candidates were able to follow this through with relevant evaluation of the methods used in relation to the specific research, and to provide relevant analysis of their outcome in relation to the topic studied.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Component 1: Question paper**

Section 1: Research: Some candidates found question 1a challenging and, although on the whole they were able to identify the relevant independent and dependent variables from the study that was presented, some candidates appeared to struggle with expressing the hypothesis as a predictable statement. Some candidates responded to the questions with a conclusion based on the results, a question or broad aim, rather than a specific testable statement.

Section 3: Social Behaviour: While candidates were able to demonstrate some good knowledge and understanding of the mandatory topic, Conformity and Obedience, some found separating these two areas challenging. This was evident with some candidates responding to question 3b with factors affecting Obedience rather than Conformity. In addition, some candidates were unable to fully describe strategies for resisting social pressure/coercion, with candidates providing a basic general description of strategies and

not following this through to a description of how the strategy could be used to resist social pressure/coercion.

### **Component 2: Assignment**

The methods section of the assignment appears to be more challenging for some candidates, with a lack of structure and some detail being omitted. Candidates will attract more marks with a clear structure and greater detail demonstrating understanding of their own research. This can be achieved through clear full descriptions of methods used, variables investigated, materials, sample and specific detail of relevant ethical issues.

Ethics: While the majority of candidates demonstrated good knowledge of the BPS Ethical Guidelines, many found putting these into practice more challenging, with the replication of unethical studies and use of unethical questionnaires where research participants and candidates are potentially subject to harm.

Research assignments in which participants are placed in potentially embarrassing or humiliating situations, are unethical. This includes replication of some social conformity research which is conducted within group situations or with the use of confederates and use of invasive questionnaires where participants are asked to provide personal information or opinion on sensitive issues or life style choices.

## **Section 3: 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, and the demand and requirements of the command words used; and receiving feedback on their performance and areas for development. Centres should ensure candidates are clear which optional topics are being studied for each unit.

Centres are encouraged to continue to support candidates with structuring their responses to fully demonstrate their ability to utilise the knowledge they have built up throughout the course to respond to the command words in the question paper.

Candidates should be encouraged and supported to organise and separate concepts, theories and approaches in the course content. By the nature of the topics studied there are areas where these are interrelated, but candidates should be helped to understand them in isolation before understanding how they can be combined to contribute to the understanding of human behaviour.

### **Component 2: Assignment**

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

When designing their assignments, candidates should be appropriately supported by centres to ensure British Psychological Society's ethical guidelines are applied throughout the process. Where assignments breach ethical guidelines, and there is a risk of physical or psychological harm, candidates are unable to access full marks for this section.

Protection of both candidates and research participants must be paramount, with the realisation that this is Higher Psychology candidates carrying out research, and not fully qualified psychology researchers with a full research support team and ethical committee overseeing the research. Consideration of sample groups must be made to ensure safety of candidates and to ensure participants themselves are over the age of 16 years. Materials used within the assignment must be carefully considered to ensure questions, pictures or stimuli do not potentially cause offence, anxiety or embarrassment to participants.

Candidates should be encouraged to provide an ethics section in the Methods section of the assignment providing detail of specific ethical issues with their research and how these have been overcome. This can include why a certain sample group have been selected, or why certain questions or pictures have been chosen.

# Grade Boundary and Statistical information

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	497
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	3591
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## 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	20.4%	20.4%	731	70
B	21.7%	42.1%	782	60
C	23.5%	65.6%	844	50
D	10.2%	75.8%	364	45
No award	24.2%	-	870	0

## 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.