



## Course Report 2018

Subject	Psychology
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

# Section 1: comments on the assessment

## Summary of the course 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, apply and analyse.

The question paper performed largely as expected, providing a fair and accessible paper for candidates to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they had acquired across the breadth of the course. However, questions 1(a) and (b) did not perform as expected. This was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries.

### Component 2: assignment

The assignment provided learners with the 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

There was a significant reduction in the amount of ethical breaches. The reduction was particularly apparent in terms of the confidentiality of participants, individual informed consent and the use of participants under the age of sixteen.

However, some breaches were still apparent. Centres are required to ensure candidates apply the British Psychological Society ethical guidelines while planning, carrying out and writing their assignment.

## Section 2: comments on candidate performance

### Areas in which candidates performed well

#### Component 1: question paper

##### Question 2

In a 20-mark analysis question such as this, a significant number of marks are available for description and evaluation, and candidates showed consistently that they were able to access these marks. They did not, however, respond to the command word 'analyse', which limited the number of marks that they could access in this question.

Analysis marks can only be awarded when candidates extend their responses and show thinking which goes beyond rote learning, for example by providing:

- ◆ implications of theories or the results of studies
- ◆ links to concepts/theories/studies
- ◆ valid conclusions
- ◆ real-life applications
- ◆ the implications of strengths/weaknesses

##### Question 3(a)

The majority of candidates were able to describe the concept of compliance. However, a surprising number of candidates appeared to have no knowledge of this key type of conformity.

##### Question 3(c)

This question was generally answered well. Knowledge and understanding of strategies that can be used to resist social pressure were well expressed.

##### Question 3(d)

The majority of candidates were able to apply their knowledge and understanding of obedience to the scenario given.

#### Component 2: assignment

Overall, candidates produced clear, well-written reports, with detailed introductions and good evaluation and analysis 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 *Psychology: Research* unit, with relevant knowledge from *Psychology: Social Behaviour* and *Psychology: Individual Behaviour* units, 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**

**Question 1(a):** Many candidates provided inaccurate independent and dependent variables.

**Question 1(b):** Candidates were required to analyse the quota method of sampling. Most candidates were able to describe and evaluate this sampling technique, but many were unable to provide an analysis.

#### **Question 3(a)**

A surprising number of candidates appeared to have no knowledge of the concept of compliance, a key type of conformity.

### **Component 2: assignment**

Most of the issues continue to relate to the development of skills such as 'describe' and 'apply'.

Many candidates did not provide a clear enough hypothesis in the introduction to gain the mark available. Candidates also tended to identify rather than describe the method and materials used in the method section. Similarly, in the results section, there was evidence of candidates calculating descriptive statistics without being able to describe why they were doing so.

Very few candidates gained full marks for ethics as responses were largely generic with little consideration of the impact their own specific research procedure would have on participants. As outlined in previous course reports, research assignments in which participants are placed in potentially upsetting, embarrassing or humiliating situations are unethical. This includes requiring participants to watch potentially upsetting videos, 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 opinions on sensitive issues or life style choices. Reports with unethical procedures cannot access the 4 marks available for this section.

In the results section, candidates rarely described why the descriptive statistics they used were chosen, which relates to the issue with the development of skills, in this case, of 'describe'.

Finally, marks for style were often lost due to the use of unscientific and/or informal language.

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

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

It is clear that candidates' knowledge and understanding of the mandatory content for the *Psychology: Individual Behaviour* unit is well developed. However, there appeared to be a comparative lack of understanding of the *Psychology: Social Behaviour* unit. Centres are advised to consult the course specification carefully when preparing to deliver the course.

As in previous examination diets, there was evidence that some candidates did not demonstrate the required skills by not responding appropriately to the command word used in the question. For example, describe, explain, evaluate, apply and analyse. Centres should look at past paper questions and the associated marking instructions (both generic and specific) to help them understand how marks are allocated. These documents provide useful information which will help to prepare candidates for future question papers.

Once again, feedback from markers indicated that some candidates who were entered at Higher level would have been better suited to National 5. Centres are therefore advised to consider the appropriate level of presentation for each candidate carefully.

### **Component 2: assignment**

Candidates should be encouraged to provide fully operationalised hypotheses in their introductions.

They should also 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). Writing in the third person should also be encouraged.

Candidates should be appropriately supported by centres to ensure that the British Psychological Society's ethical guidelines are applied when designing their assignments. If assignments breach ethical guidelines, candidates will not be able to access marks for this section.

The protection of both candidates and research participants must be paramount. Centre staff should be mindful that these are Higher Psychology candidates, and not fully qualified psychology researchers (with a full research support team and ethical committee overseeing the research). Materials used in the assignment must be carefully considered to ensure that questions, pictures, videos or other stimuli do not have the potential to cause offence, anxiety or embarrassment.

Candidates should be encouraged to include an ethics subsection in the methods section of the assignment to provide details of ethical issues specific to their own research and how these have been overcome. This could include, for example, the reasons why a certain sample group has 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 2017	3666
Number of resulted entries in 2018	3495

### Statistical information: performance of candidates

#### Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	13.4%	13.4%	470	66
B	20.1%	33.6%	704	57
C	24.0%	57.6%	838	48
D	13.4%	70.9%	467	43
No award	29.1%	-	1016	-

## **General commentary on grade boundaries**

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.