



GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCE (NEW)
PSYCHOLOGY
AS/Advanced**

SUMMER 2017

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UNIT 1 – PAST TO PRESENT

General Comments

Overall, the majority of candidates attempted every question on this exam. There was a clear range and depth of knowledge but this was often hindered in AO3 evaluation questions because of over reliance on textbook answers. This led to restricted evaluation and therefore less marks for candidates. AO1 description skills were the strongest with AO2 application skills being by far the weakest answered questions. It is important for centres to note that in order to achieve AO2 marks, candidates must just simply answer the question. If the question requires reference to a statement then candidates must ensure that they do this in their answer to be able to access the full range of marks. It is also important for centres to ensure that candidates look at the allocation of marks and answer accordingly. Many candidates are spending too long on 4 mark questions which does not allow them the time to focus on questions with a higher allocation of marks elsewhere in the exam.

Question 1

There were some excellent top band answers for this question with good use of specialist terms and specific facts that improved answers e.g. Child Guidance Clinic, Binet Scale, description of the control group. Some candidates used sub-headings which is acceptable and helped them to develop their answers. It was obvious that centres used the WJEC summary sheet and the original article. A small number of candidates included irrelevant evaluation and/or findings from Bowlby's research which is not creditworthy in a procedures question.

Question 2

This was by far the best answered question on the paper with many candidates gaining full marks. Explanations were clear and concise with some candidates using diagrams to aid explanations. Candidates who achieved lower band marks did not link the explanation to psychology, which was particularly evident in evolution and localisation answers. These candidates gave excellent descriptions of these assumptions but without a clear link to behaviours or characteristics.

Question 3

Unfortunately this question was not answered well with many candidates gaining only 2 or 3 marks. There are many different ways to interpret "simple" e.g. reductionism, determinism, nature/nurture debate, use of non-human animals etc. but candidates did not do this. Many candidates discussed a strength and a weakness, which was not necessary, but both were credited. Others did not link to the behaviourist approach, instead giving generic strengths and/or weaknesses that could apply to many approaches if the word behaviourism was taken out. There must be a clear link to the approach in order to access the higher mark band.

Question 4

This question produced many basic generic answers that were sadly based on one textbook. Lots of candidates presented detail about the approaches without any explicit comparing or contrasting, therefore making them simple 'description' answers rather than evaluative 'compare and contrast' ones. Candidates who did perform well on this question used the debates effectively to compare and contrast e.g. determinism, usefulness etc. Mini conclusions were used very well by some candidates but other centres lost marks because no conclusions were evident throughout answers or as a whole conclusion at the end. Both of these are acceptable.

Question 5a

This question was either very poorly answered or not attempted at all in most cases. Lots of candidates stated findings of the study rather than conclusions. Where relevant conclusions were presented the focus was on language affecting memory, recall bias and distortion but there was little relevant detail to aid understanding for the full 6 marks. Due to this few candidates were able to access the top band. Many discussed the social implications which were not credited as a conclusion of Loftus and Palmer. It is important to note that only conclusions from Loftus and Palmer's original research could be credited.

Question 5b

Ethics were answered well with a range of ethical issues identified e.g. potential psychological harm, valid consent and deception. These issues were well linked to the study. Social implications were weak on the whole but the candidates that did discuss them did so well. Lower band answers lacked the 'discussion' element with candidates writing list like answers and omitting social implications. A maximum of half marks could be awarded if social implications did not feature in the answers.

Question 6

A significant amount of candidates either did not attempt this question or wrote very little for it. A clear lack of knowledge hindered candidates' ability to evaluate Raine *et al.*'s research and some detail was incorrect e.g. gender bias (there are more male criminals than female criminals so Raine *et al.*'s sample reflected this). Answers were generic at times and not linked to Raine *et al.* This research should be an area of focus for centres.

Question 7a

Most centres chose to write about Mindfulness for this question. Some candidates used the assumptions and linked in well. These are the answers that attracted higher marks. Candidates who did not refer to the assumptions gained lower marks due to the fact that the therapies are based on the assumptions of the positive approach and should therefore be referred to in a discussion of the therapy. Some answers focused on effectiveness studies being the reason why psychologists would see the therapy as appropriate. This was sound but lots of students failed to link to the method of the therapy to justify the connection between the therapy and effectiveness.

Question 7b

Quality of Life Therapy was much better answered than Mindfulness overall with candidates giving excellent descriptions of the CASIO model, the 'Three Pillars' etc. Mindfulness tended to be lacking in appropriate terminology and answers were VERY repetitive with breathing techniques being the main focus of the answer. Centres must use the wealth of information that goes beyond textbooks. There are many types of mindfulness that can be considered e.g. Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy etc.

Question 8

On the whole this was a well answered question with excellent examples using Pavlov, Skinner and Watson and Raynor. Descriptions were detailed and there was often a clear link to psychology. Candidates who lost marks mainly lost them due to the lack of use of appropriate terminology e.g. positive reinforcement, punishment, unconditioned stimulus, neutral stimulus etc. There were also some inaccuracies when describing terms e.g. the bell was the unconditioned stimulus and incorrect descriptions of negative reinforcement.

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UNIT 2 – USING PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

General Comments

This year the spread of responses appeared much broader, reflecting the confidence that has begun to build in the second year of a new specification. A number of improvements can be seen from last year's paper, where questions on location of research (Question 6c) and measures of central tendency (Questions 6di-iii) were well answered overall. Much like last year, students were very capable when it came to questions that required use of their psychological imagination and understanding to be demonstrated in a way that could not be prepared for before the examination itself (Question 4). This is encouraging as it shows a genuine psychological understanding that will stand them in good stead for the research methods paper at A2. Areas for improvement remain focused on more challenging aspects of the specification; levels of data (Questions 7d and 7e), and social and developmental psychology (Questions 3 and 5).

Question 1

Responses to this question showed much more variation in quality in comparison to last year. Key areas of weakness included the fact that some evidence provided for the debate was not well linked to 'controlling' the behaviour of children. For example, candidates who included the role of peer groups and other alternative influences on behaviour (beyond conditioning), such as social learning theory, rarely related this to the question stem. This meant the information gained limited credit, where writing style made a considerable difference to the quality of the argument provided and amount of credit awarded. Centres are encouraged to ensure that candidates understand the purpose of each debate and address the question put before them rather than providing a stock answer, for example ensuring in the case of this year's question that social and ethical implications of the debate were included.

Question 2

There were a surprising number of candidates that were not able to define what was meant by the term 'operationalisation of variables'. Many erroneously stated that operationalisation was control of extraneous variables. Unfortunately, those that did know the term rarely provided enough detail for more than 1 mark. An example to elaborate their point would have done this, and those answers which were muddled benefitted if their example demonstrated understanding of the concept following a poorly articulated definition.

Question 3

- a) Many candidates had a good understanding of an advantage/disadvantage of self-selected sampling which was encouraging. I would like to reiterate that 'quick and easy' is only acceptable if a comparison is made to an alternative sampling method that is less so, or a justification for this point is made (e.g. This sampling technique was easy, as once an advertisement was placed in the New Haven newspaper, Milgram just had to wait for the participants to respond.) Many candidates unfortunately did not link their points to Milgram's research (other than using the word Milgram) limiting their responses to half marks.

- b) In this aspect candidates were asked 'how one other sampling technique could have been used by Milgram to select his participants'. Too many candidates just named an alternative technique, gaining no credit. How the technique could have been used and specific relation to the context of Milgram's study would have achieved full marks, however this was rarely seen.

Question 4

Despite this question requiring candidates to think on their feet, there were a wide range of well-articulated and plausible suggestions for Kohlberg's choice of adolescent male participants. Many candidates gained only 1 mark. This is because whilst the suggestion given was appropriate links to Kohlberg's research, beyond comments within the question itself, were limited. Candidates should be encouraged to include broader details from Kohlberg's study into their justifications/answers e.g. links to moral development, the dilemmas, the longitudinal nature of the study etc.

Question 5

- a) Most candidates answered this question accurately, using Kohlberg as an example to elaborate their answer. Although this link to Kohlberg was not required, this was a good way to provide detail and show understanding.
- b) Many candidates were able to comment upon how researcher bias might impact validity, but by contrast how this related to Kohlberg's research lacked accuracy in articulation. Many students explained the basic ideas well, but used examples which did not correlate with their descriptions e.g. they stated that researcher bias would negatively influence internal validity of the boy's responses to the moral dilemmas, but explained this through the idea that the boys might lie (social desirability) rather than the fact that Kohlberg may have used leading questions. Very few used the hint provided in the question stem relating to 'culture bound moral concepts' as a talking point. Whilst this was again not a necessity, centres are encouraged to train their candidates to read all aspects of the question, so that they benefit from the 'clues' provided in scenarios and question stem information. It is also encouraged that candidates should use the mark allocation for each question to gauge lengths, breadth and depth of response required.

Question 6

- a) As a relatively new aspect of the specification, it was encouraging that many centres had clearly taught candidates about the differences between experiments and quasi-experiments. However, too many candidates made the error of confusing the setting in which an experiment takes place with the nature of the experiment. A significant number of students stated a difference was the fact that quasi-experiments are in a natural setting and experiments are not. This is not necessarily the case and did not gain credit. For example, a test in a laboratory which compares the scores of men and women is a quasi-experiment, not an experiment, because of the fact that the participants are not randomly allocated.

- b) Encouragingly, many candidates were able to give an appropriate disadvantage of an independent groups design successfully. A minority of candidates did however give an advantage, which was not credit worthy.
- c) Candidates were able to access this question well across the board, however it is important to again stress the use of the mark allocation as a guide for length, depth and breadth of answer required. Many candidates clearly knew the relative positives and negatives of research conducted in the field, but lacked detail in their responses. Please note that a conclusion is not needed for evaluation that is worth 9 marks or less.
- d)
 - (i) This question was well answered. However, a small minority of candidates had chosen not to include anomalous results. Please be advised that in psychology all results are included in a mean calculation.
 - (ii) As mean is a form of descriptive statistic, and inferential statistics cannot be tested on this paper, only descriptive conclusions were acceptable. This meant that the language used to articulate the conclusion given was very important in this question. Any inferences, e.g. men are 15 minutes quicker at completing flat-packed furniture than women, prohibited full marks. A basic statement of the results on the other hand, e.g. males were 15 minutes slower (mean times) than females to complete the flat-packed furniture, gained full marks.
 - (iii) Candidates tended to fall into one of two categories for this answer; they either knew a disadvantage or they didn't. Unfortunately only a minority, that knew an appropriate disadvantage, then related it to the data to gain the second mark available.
- e) This question was well answered and had a high attempt rate. Candidates were able to outline what was meant by qualitative data with relative ease.
- f) Content analysis in psychology refers to the systematic conversion of qualitative data into quantitative data, through coding systems etc. Those candidates who knew this often failed to include relevant examples and as such failed to achieve full marks. Unfortunately, many candidates chose not to attempt this question and those that did, in the main, did not fare well. It appears that some candidates have been disadvantaged by learning that may have taken place for other humanities/social science based subject specialisms.

Question 7

- a) The majority of candidates were able to correctly identify the IV (use of an internet search engine or not) and DV (knowledge rating) in this scenarios and place those points into an appropriate alternative hypothesis. Some candidates incorrectly identified the DV as the score on the film quizzes and so scored half marks.
- b) Almost all candidates correctly identified their own hypothesis to be directional/non-directional. Some were able to articulate why this was the case in context.
- c) Whilst the attempt rate for this question was high, the credit rating was low. Issues of reliability should relate directly to the impact on the DV (rating of knowledge). Too many candidates described validity issues, or did not relate their reliability issue to 'ratings of knowledge'. This is an area that should be addressed by centres so that potential future iterations of this type of question gain better responses. Whilst a wide range of answers would have been acceptable, good responses were quite rare.

- d) Levels of data is historically difficult. It was encouraging to see that some candidates did know a basic difference between nominal and ordinal data, but few offered any explanation for why this difference occurred and thus failed to fully respond to the question.
- e) A surprising number of candidates did not choose the correct level of data for a scale (ordinal).
- f) The bar chart was well drawn by most candidates. It was encouraging to see the inclusion of a chart title, which was required for full marks on this year's paper. Minor errors were seen in the labelling of axes, where candidates are encouraged to use the data provided in the tables to maintain accuracy e.g. referring to the modal scores.

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UNIT 3 – IMPLICATIONS IN THE REAL WORLD

General Comments

It was very pleasing to see how well candidates had been prepared for this unit, particularly for the 'Behaviours' section. Candidates demonstrated both breadth and depth of knowledge about explanations and methods of modifying behaviours. Answers were frequently very well planned and structured and the answers including frequent conclusions and references to scenario / statement / question (where required) achieved the highest marks.

However, the answers to the 'Controversies' questions were less well answered, with candidates appearing to rely on pre-prepared material which often did not address the question that had been asked. Unfortunately, there was little evidence of planning for these answers which often resulted in large amounts of purely descriptive material being included which, as it was not linked in any way to an evaluative point, could not be credited.

In general, candidates showed good understanding of the command words although there was some tendency to include AO1 material in questions where this could not be credited and conversely, offering evaluative material (AO3) in response to questions that simply asked for descriptions. However, it was AO2 that proved to be the weakest area. Where AO2 is required, candidates need to make explicit links to scenarios / statements / debates, making it clear that they understand the relevance of the material to the question that has been asked. Answers achieving in the highest mark bands made these links frequently throughout their answers, using signalling phrases such as 'this shows that', 'this supports the argument that' and 'this can be linked to the scenario by'.

**Section A
Implications in the Real World**

1. Addictive Behaviours

- (a) This question asked for both AO1 and AO2 skills. Candidates were able to describe explanations of addictive behaviour, often in considerable detail. Cognitive biases (an individual differences explanation) and addiction genes / dopamine (biological explanations) were most commonly chosen. The AO2 marks were awarded for application to the scenario, which included several details which could have been linked to explanations. These included the 'feeling of irritation if someone else was playing on 'their' machine' and 'playing longer than intended' which could have been linked to biological explanations such as the role of dopamine and 'the belief that one is not playing with real money', 'the developments of a personal relationship with the machine' and lying about how much money they have won or lost' which could all have been linked to individual differences explanations such as cognitive biases. Credit was given both for application to the general topic of gambling as well as to the specific behaviours described in the scenario. For most candidates, this application needed to be more explicit. Some candidates simply described two explanations of addictive behaviours with little or no application to the scenario at all. This resulted in AO2 being judged 'superficial' at best.

- (b) This question asked for AO3 skills. Both agonist / antagonist substitution and aversion therapy were chosen by candidates. Centres are reminded that there are no marks available for description of the therapy and whilst candidates might usefully include a brief statement of which method of modification they have chosen to evaluate, there is no need to describe this in detail before evaluating it. Answers could have been improved even further by drawing out the evaluation points clearly, by stating that 'this is a strength/ weakness' or by explaining the reasons for including the information that they included, for example, 'this supports the argument that this method of modifying addictive behaviours is effective'.

2. Autistic Spectrum Behaviours

- (a) This question asked for AO1 skills. Candidates showed good understanding of the characteristics of autism spectrum disorders and most covered communication skills, social interaction and lack of play / restricted range of interests. The answers that achieved top band marks were well structured (usually using the broad areas described above) and used appropriate terminology throughout.
- (b) This question asked for AO2 and AO3 skills. AO2 marks were awarded for explicit references to the statement that social psychological explanations do/do not fully explain autistic spectrum behaviours and for clearly developed arguments that social psychological explanations do / do not fully explain autistic spectrum behaviours with or without explicit links to the statement. This tended to be where candidates performed poorly. Despite being able to offer some excellent evaluations of the social psychological explanations of autistic spectrum behaviours, many candidates then failed to make any kind of reference to the statement in the question. Candidates should be advised to make links to the statement in this kind of question frequently and explicitly.

3. Bullying Behaviour

- (a) This question asked for AO1 skills. This behaviour was infrequently chosen by centres, however, those candidates who had studied this behaviour were able to describe the CAPSLE method in reasonable detail.
- (b) This question asked for AO2 and AO3 skills. AO2 marks were awarded for explicit links to the scenario such as direct statements of advice given to the head teacher as well as conclusions linked to the relative effectiveness of different methods of modifying bullying behaviour in the scenario. This tended to be where candidates performed poorly. Most could give good evaluation of the different methods of modifying bullying behaviour but did not link this sufficiently to the scenario.

4. Criminal behaviours

- (a) This question asked for AO1 skills. Candidates were generally able to answer this well although it was common for answers focussing on the amygdala to explain the link between the amygdala and aggression in detail, but did not extend this to the link between the amygdala and crime.
- (b) This question asked for AO2 and AO3 skills. Candidates produced some excellent answers to this question and AO2 was addressed well. However, there were a surprising number of candidates who mixed up nature and nurture, interpreting 'made' in the question as nature.

5. Schizophrenia

- (a) This question asked for AO1 skills. This was generally answered well with most candidates focussing on psychodynamic explanations / schizophrenogenic mothering and thought disorder. Worryingly, there were some indications that inappropriate explanations were being used, most noticeably social psychological explanations such as living in urban environments being offered as individual differences explanations of schizophrenia. Whilst we accept that there is some overlap between explanations and centres can be assured that we will accept explanations as for example, an individual differences explanation, if the candidate makes an argument for this, there will be some cases such as this where it is not possible to do this.
- (b) (i) This question asked for AO2 skills. Most candidates were able to explain a biological method of modifying schizophrenia (most frequently drug therapies). However, the question asked for an explanation of how biological explanations could be applied to methods of modifying schizophrenia. Often answers simply needed a brief sentence to link the explanation to the method of modifying. When students did do this, they did it very well and often achieved full marks.
- (ii) This question asked for AO3 skills. Most candidates were able to evaluate biological explanations although answers would have been improved by the inclusion of more explicitly stated points and more frequent conclusions. Candidates only infrequently evaluated with reference to debates such as nature – nurture or the influence of environmental factors as an evaluation of biological explanations, tending to stick to research evidence for the biological explanations.

6. Stress

- (a) This answer asked for AO1 skills. Candidates could select any two explanations of stress. Most frequently chosen were the role of adrenaline (biological) and hardiness (individual differences). Descriptions of the biological explanations for stress were particularly impressive in terms of their level of detail, use of terminology and understanding.
- (b) This question asked for AO2 and AO3 skills. Most candidates were able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of both beta blockers and stress inoculation training although again, links to the scenario were often lacking. To achieve AO3 marks, candidates needed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of beta-blockers and stress inoculation training and to achieve AO2 marks, candidates needed to identify how these strengths and weaknesses would apply to Gareth or to the specific features of his case (anxiety, increased heart rate etc.). However, when candidates did so this, they made explicit links to Gareth's symptoms and some answers offered him advice re possible side effects.

Section B Controversies

7. Ethical costs of conducting research.

This question asked for AO2 and AO3 skills. Answers to this question were disappointing with a majority of candidates seeming to offer pre-prepared answers on ethical issues, often including lengthy AO1 descriptions of unethical studies, with no link to the question. Many answers started by defining ethical costs, rather than guidelines. Unfortunately none of this material could be credited unless it was explicitly linked to the strengths and weaknesses of having ethical guidelines. There was little evidence that candidates had planned their answers to this question. Answers that did address the question were able to suggest a number of reasons why we should have ethical guidelines (to ensure safety of participants, to allow participants and the general public to have confidence in taking part in research for example) and a number of reasons why we should not have ethical guidelines (prevention of potentially useful research) and used research as examples to back up the points that they were making. It was striking how often otherwise very strong candidates lost marks here for simply not addressing the question and conversely, how weaker candidates often did well on this question, perhaps because they did not immediately fall back on a pre-prepared answer and responded to the question that was set.

Reference to the quote was not required but offered students another way to achieve AO2 marks, by linking explicitly to either the need to say 'sorry' or to the concept of 'good research'. Some candidates used these opportunities well and considered different interpretations of good research (whether this was good because it was useful or good because it was ethical for example).

8. Non-human animals

This question asked for AO2 and AO3 skills. Although this was generally better answered compared to Question 8, answers were still overly descriptive, with many answers giving detailed descriptions of the guidelines for research with animals with no explicit link to the question that had been asked. Candidates needed to develop their arguments to include conclusions and links to the question. Once again, there was lots of simple description of unethical studies without conclusions which could have been credited as evaluation. It was also notable that many candidates were using examples of animal research which was not psychological (medical and cosmetic testing for example). Animal assisted therapy was often described but unfortunately there was a tendency to simply say 'this is one way that animals have been used' and then include lengthy descriptions of this work without any evaluative points being made at all. However, there were also some very strong evaluations of research in this area.

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UNIT 4 – APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS

General comments

Most candidates attempted every question on the paper. The discriminators on the paper seemed to be the personal investigations with the top band answers clearly indicating that the candidates had fully carried out both investigations. The other discriminator was question 5 and depended on how well the candidates described how to carry out a non-participant observation.

**Section A
INVESTIGATION ONE**

Question 1

- (a) (i) Generally well answered with most candidates stating a hypothesis with a clear IV and DV.
- (ii) Mixed answers on this question with many candidates just stating results e.g. number of words remembered which is not how the DV is operationalised. A better answer would be the number of words remembered from a list of thirty words of equal length.
- (b) Generally well answered with the higher scoring candidates clearly stating the design used e.g. independent groups and describing the procedure in enough detail that it could easily be replicated. The weaker candidates tended to describe the background to the study and how the results were analysed. However, this is not part of the procedure.
- (c) Most candidates were clearly able to identify two ethical issues and explained how they were dealt with but many candidates lost marks by not relating the issues to the specific study.

INVESTIGATION TWO

Question 2

- (a) Unfortunately candidates confused these two questions a) was outline findings which is referring to quantitative data/numbers many candidates made generalised statements e.g. a conclusion. Question b) asked for a conclusion and many candidates referred to figures and statistics which are findings.
- (b) This was generally well answered with candidates discussing issues of validity with their case study. The higher scoring candidates were clearly able to link it to their study. Weaker candidates made generic statements about sample size and biased interpretation without any specific link to their case study.

SECTION B

Question 3

- (a) Unfortunately, this was a poorly answered question many candidates unclear what content analysis was. The candidates who did understand the term content analysis did not refer to the study and therefore only received partial credit.
- (b) This was generally well answered by most candidates. However, the discriminator again was the fact that the candidates did not refer to the study in their answer i.e. they did not put their answer in context.
- (c) As this question was an AO3 skill to receive any marks the candidate had to refer to the study described in question three (this only had to be superficial e.g. using the word interview) consequently candidates either scored well or received no credit.

Question 4

Generally this was the best answered question on the paper.

- (a) Candidates had to state that the research was a correlation with at least ordinal level data. Most candidates achieved full marks in this question.
- (b) Again this was a straight forward answer e.g. a strong positive correlation was found. Most candidates received at least partial credit by stating that a positive correlation was found.
- (c) Again this question was generally well answered with a variety of answers receiving full credit e.g. the hypothesis was supported because the results occurring by chance was less than 5% or/and the null was rejected.

Question 5

This question was a discriminator as it was worth 15 marks.

Generally this question was well answered with the candidates achieving top band marks by describing in detail how to carry out a non-participant observation. These candidates tended to include all the terms given in the question e.g. event/time sampling and it was clear that they understood the terminology and how to apply it. The weaker candidates confused an observation with an experiment and consequently used incorrect terminology, although they were still able to achieve marks in the mid band ranges 5-8 (some use of appropriate terminology).



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