

GCE Examiners' Report

Psychology

GCE

Summer 2025

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Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	<p>Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade.</p> <p>For unitted specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level.</p> <p>For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.</p>	For unitted specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Contents

	Page
Executive summary	5
UNIT 1 – PAST TO PRESENT	6
UNIT 2 – USING PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS	9
UNIT 3 – IMPLICATIONS IN THE REAL WORLD	13
UNIT 4 – APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS	17
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	21

Executive Summary

Across all four units, candidates demonstrated strong engagement and effort, with high attempt rates and notable improvements in several areas.

In Unit 1, responses to assumptions and relationships questions were particularly strong, and many candidates showed excellent knowledge of classic psychological evidence. However, a key area for development remains ensuring that answers are clearly focused on the specific requirements of each question, especially in longer responses where deeper evaluation is expected.

In Unit 2, the standard of research methods knowledge was consistently good, with balanced performance across all assessment objectives. Encouragingly, there were significant improvements in areas that had previously been weaker, such as evaluating measures of central tendency and, to a lesser extent, dispersion. However, contextualisation remains a major challenge, particularly in Section B, where many candidates failed to apply their knowledge effectively to the given scenarios. Questions on internal reliability also proved difficult, with few candidates able to define the term accurately or identify relevant issues in context. On a positive note, the contemporary debate on the mother as the primary caregiver was widely attempted, with high-quality evidence and arguments presented.

Unit 3 saw many excellent responses, with candidates demonstrating strong preparation and an improved ability to structure answers appropriately. There was clear progress in applying psychological explanations to specific behaviours and in elaborating AO3 points. Standalone application questions were also handled well. However, combined skill questions (AO2/3) remained problematic, with many candidates failing to integrate the scenario or statement effectively. Controversies questions were again poorly answered, often due to reliance on generic, pre-prepared responses that did not address the specific question focus.

In Unit 4, candidates continued to show strong engagement, with improved contextualisation in both personal investigations and novel scenarios. Nonetheless, some areas proved challenging, including understanding how validity is assessed in quasi-experiments, justifying the choice of inferential statistical tests in correlational studies, and explaining the appropriateness of using the mean in novel contexts. These areas should be prioritised for future improvement.

Overall, while there are still areas requiring targeted development—particularly contextualisation and question-specific focus—there has been a clear and pleasing improvement in research methods knowledge and application across the series.

PSYCHOLOGY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 1 – PAST TO PRESENT

Overview of the Unit

As in previous years there were some outstanding responses across all of the different question types. Assumptions and relationships questions continue to be well answered, and many candidates showed excellent knowledge of classic evidence. The main area for improvement was ensuring that answers focused on the requirements of the question and that longer answer questions demonstrated a deeper discussion of evaluation points.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 (a) Most candidates were able to describe what was meant by the assumption and make reference to different types of conditioning. Candidates attempted to use examples from psychology to illustrate the assumption as required by the question. However, these examples were not always used clearly to explain it. For example, many candidates gave lengthy descriptions of animal-based conditioning studies (e.g. Skinners rats and operant conditioning) but did not go on to explain how the same processes might be seen in humans (e.g. reward charts for children). Some candidates received low marks as they simply re-worded the assumption, rather than elaborating on what this meant and how it could be seen in the behaviourist approach.
- (b) Many candidates were able to give a description of the concept of a blank slate/tabula rasa, and add more detail by referring to concepts such as environmental determinism and conditioning. When using examples to illustrate the assumption, most candidates used either the Watson and Rayner classic evidence or referred to Bandura's Bobo Doll studies on aggression. However, in many cases these studies were outlined accurately but it was not always made clear how these demonstrated the concept of a blank slate. The best answers emphasised for example, that Little Albert began the study with no phobia of the white rat but that this was learnt through the conditioning processes introduced during the study.
- Q.2 In this question, candidates were required to give an accurate and detailed description of a biological therapy (either drug therapy or psychosurgery). It was clear that many candidates had an excellent knowledge of one of these therapies, and there were some very detailed answers given. However, some answers were limited by not always effectively balancing the depth and range in their response. For example, when describing the mode of action of particular drug therapies, some candidates were not able to give enough detail about how they worked to address the psychological problem they were designed to treat. Or they gave detailed descriptions of one type of drug therapy (e.g. antidepressants), but did not go on to describe different types in order to increase the range of their answer. The same was true in some of the psychosurgery answers. For example, some candidates could name a range of different types of psychosurgery but did not fully explain how the process would treat a particular psychological issue.

- Q.3 This question required candidates to identify an appropriate difference between the psychodynamic and biological approaches, use examples from each approach to illustrate it and then go on to explain how this might support the tutors view about the psychodynamic approach being weaker. As this was an AO2 question, clear links to the scenario were required to access full marks. Most responses focused on the lack of scientific status in the psychodynamic approach compared to the biological approach. As with comparison questions in the past, many candidates could identify the difference and give examples but were not able to articulate why this might make one approach better or worse than the other, for example increased credibility through use of the scientific method.
- Q.4 (a) When identifying a strength of the positive approach, most candidates focused on the acknowledgement of free will or the usefulness of applications to different settings such as therapy and education. Many candidates were able to give appropriate examples from the approach. In some cases where an appropriate point was identified, it was not always fully explained why this might be considered a strength of the approach. Similarly, some candidates gave examples from the approach but did not always use these effectively to illustrate the strength. Some candidates also evaluated the therapy rather than the approach, which was not appropriate for this question.
- (b) Overall candidates seemed to find it harder to identify an appropriate weakness of the positive approach. There was also some confusion in areas such as the nature/nurture debate. Some candidates stated that the approach ignores the role of biological factors in wellbeing but work by Lyubomirsky et al (2005) notes an interaction between genes and the environment in influencing happiness. The best answers referred to issues in measuring happiness objectively or potential issues in acknowledging free will. As with question 4a, there were some candidates who were not able to explain their answers in enough detail or utilise their chosen examples effectively to access the highest marks.
- Q.5 (a) There were some excellent answers to this question, where candidates had remembered an impressive amount of detail about the findings for different factors that were investigated. However, it is important that teachers and candidates utilise the original article to check the accuracy of information quoted in other sources. Most candidates described findings from the first section of the article (e.g. age, gender) and were able to give information about specific findings from the studies used as part of the literature review. A small number of candidates gave information about more than two factors, which was not required by the question.
- (b) A number of candidates were able to accurately describe the conclusions of this study, giving detailed descriptions of the elements of a theory of happiness described in the article and some of the broader conclusions drawn. However a number of responses simply repeated findings, which received no credit. As with all classic evidence questions, it is vital that candidates tailor their responses to the parts of the study required by the question.

- Q.6 Most candidates were able to make reference to a suitable explanation for relationship formation using an assumption from the cognitive approach. The best answers made clear reference to an assumption (usually schemas, although others could be used effectively), describing briefly what they were and then linking them to a specific theory of relationships such as the matching hypothesis or the halo effect. They then went on to clearly link back to the formation of relationships. Some answers did not use terminology effectively enough to access the higher marks or did not clearly explain how the concepts described might affect who relationships are formed with.
- Q.7 In this AO2 question, candidates were required to apply their knowledge of the psychodynamic assumptions to a therapy from the approach. The vast majority focused their answer on dream analysis, and many candidates were able to explain how gaining insight into the unconscious mind is linked to analysing the dream and interpreting the content. Some answers were limited by too much emphasis on the origins of dreams and descriptions of different symbols used without an explanation of how this is linked to a therapeutic process and the treatment of psychological problems.
- Q.8 This question asked candidates to evaluate a behaviourist therapy, and they could include both effectiveness and ethical issues. The best answers included research evidence, and were able to explain how this illustrated the effectiveness of the therapy being evaluated. Successful responses also included specific examples from the therapy, making the evaluation specific to the context. There were some very good explanations of the difficulties systematic desensitisation may have in treating innate phobias with an evolutionary origin. Some answers were list like in nature, which limited the depth of evaluation the candidate was able to include and therefore the marks that could be awarded.
- Q.9 Many candidates were able to give concise, clear and detailed descriptions of the methodology of this study. They accurately outlined the method, location of the research and details about the sample used. A few candidates included too many details about procedure and findings of the study, which was not required by the question and was therefore not credited.
- Q.10 As with question 9, there were some excellent answers to this question. Candidates were able to accurately describe the procedures of the research and included a range of relevant details such as the timescales for different parts of the study and appropriate terminology. There were times when candidates muddled up numbers which limited marks.
- Q.11 Unfortunately for this question, there were a number of candidates who focused their answer on describing rather than evaluating the study. For many candidates this was all they included and they received no credit for this. Some also wasted time at the start of their answer giving a description of the study before beginning the evaluation. It is important that candidates respond to the command word in the question set. Where candidates evaluated the study effectively, they were able to identify appropriate evaluation points, give context from the study, and explain how this might be a strength or weakness of the study. As with question 8, many answers were list like, and lacked the development of argument to access the higher bands despite the range of relevant points included.

PSYCHOLOGY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 2 – USING PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

Overview of the Unit

Once again, it was very pleasing to see that the standard of research methods knowledge for AS Psychology was good. All assessment objectives are tested in this unit and no one objective was answered better than another. There were significant improvements in knowledge for areas where candidates had performed poorly in the past e.g. evaluating measures of central tendency and, to a lesser extent, dispersion. Unfortunately, many of the candidates struggled to contextualise their knowledge (Q.8 (d) (ii)) meaning they failed to score marks. Contextualisation is the main area candidates need to focus on to pick up marks in Section B. This year there were some areas that candidates found particularly challenging, for example, very few of the candidates were able to either correctly define 'internal reliability' (Q.7 (a)(i)) or identify an appropriate reliability issue in context (Q.7 (a)(ii)). All parts were attempted at high rates, which is a credit to the effort and engagement of all involved in the processes that go into training candidates for these assessments. This year the contemporary debate (relating to the mother as the primary caregiver of an infant) was popular with candidates, where very few failed to attempt a response of some type. The standard of evidence was high, and the quality of the arguments provided in the contemporary debate were at a similarly high standard seen last year.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 This question was well answered and attempted by most candidates. This year a significant number of candidates, for the first time, attempted to really engage with the statement – focusing on why the mother does not need to be the primary caregiver of an infant. This was very pleasing and shows a willingness of both candidates and their teachers to engage with the material presented rather than wrote learning responses. Themes discussed invariably included Freudian views, Bowlby's interpretation of the role of the mother, the work of Harlow and Harlow, the role of the father in child rearing and, less frequently, the role of alternative caregivers (other than biological parents). Good answers had detail about the findings of research from within these themes and explicit evaluation of that research in context. Excellent examples of evaluation came from consideration of the historical context of the research presented, and the social and economic implications of the mother as the primary caregiver of an infant today. Arguments that created a logical flow of information, building on previous themes, scored more highly than those answers that tackled one side of the debate before switching to the other, without making many comparisons. Moreover, critical reflection on the accuracy of the quote, throughout the answer, allowed candidates to score highly.
- Q.2 When asked to define a repeated measures experimental design, using an example, candidates were generally able to identify at least one aspect of the design e.g. that it involved using the same participants across two conditions. Very few explained that their performance in the two conditions would be compared, and the examples given showed wide variation. This question was well attempted.

- Q.3 This was an AO2 question, where the candidates had to apply their knowledge of Kohlberg's research to create a hypothetical aim. Those who attempted this question invariably were able to say something about the development of morality in stages, or over time, but very few gave enough detail/context beyond rewording the title of his research to be able to access full marks.
- Q.4 This question was both well attempted and accessible to candidates. This was a new format for questioning that focused on the 'why' behind a key term, making it more difficult than traditional definition questions. Candidates responded well, and those who knew the definition of social desirability were accurately able to explain why it had a negative effect of validity in research. However, it was quite common to see that candidates confused social desirability with demand characteristics.
- Q.5 This was a two-part question, made up of a) an application of a strength of qualitative data to Milgram's research, and b) the drawing of a bar chart to represent tabulated results. Whilst most candidates were able to give a strength of qualitative data, very few applied it to Milgram's research beyond using Milgram's name. Unfortunately, the use of his name alone does not constitute contextualisation, nor does the word obedience (as it is in the question stem), and as such many candidates failed to achieve any marks on this question due to a lack of context. Those who did this question well were able to talk about specific qualitative data Milgram collected, e.g. his observations of the 'teacher's' body language/responses to the prods, or their answers to post observation interviews, explaining why this data benefitted Milgram's understanding of obedience to authority. In the second part, the bar chart, candidates scored well when they used an appropriate scale. Many candidates are still failing to include a title to their charts, despite this being a problem across all past series.
- Q.6 Most candidates attempted to explain the role of an ethics committee. Some were under the misconception that the 'create' ethical guidelines or that the BPS were the ethics committee. Those who were able to give some range to their response, beyond saying that they give permission for research to be conducted, scored more highly, as did those who were able to explain their roles and responsibilities to both the researcher and possible future participants.
- Q.7 This question was the first novel scenario question on the paper; it contained the most accessible questions (Q. 7 (f)(i) and (ii)) and some of the least well answered questions (Q.7 (a)(i) and (ii)). Candidates really struggled with the concept of reliability. Invariably, in Q. 7 (a)(i) where they were asked to define internal reliability, they either defined validity or external reliability. There were only two other questions on the paper answered more poorly than this. Part (a)(ii) was answered marginally better than (a)(i) as they did not have to stick specifically to internal reliability when explaining an issue of reliability in the scenario. That said, a significant number of candidates still described validity issues like demand characteristics and thus failed to achieve any marks on this question. Reliability is an area in need of focus for future series. Q.7 (b) asked candidates to define the term 'target population'. Too many candidates just rephrased the question saying, 'it is the population the researcher is targeting'. This was also a problem in Q.9 (a) where candidates had to define the term 'directional hypothesis'. Those who answered this type of question well made their responses clearer with an example. Q. 7 (c) was generally well answered, where candidates who correctly described systematic sampling only failed to score full marks if they lacked detail in their contextualisation. Q. 7 (d) was the annual levels of measurement question, which, unlike previous series, was well answered.

Almost all candidates did respond at least with a level of measurement, fewer candidates were giving erroneous terms this year e.g. qualitative data, suggesting an improvement in understanding of this historically tricky area of the specification. Q. 7 (e) was well attempted, but not well contextualised, where candidates gave weaknesses of self-reports, but invariably did not give detail in context. Centres should be reminded that information given in the question stem cannot be used as contextualisation for that sub-part of the question. Q. 7 (f)(i) and (ii) were well responded, they had the highest attempt rates and were the most accessible questions on the paper.

- Q.8 This second novel scenario question began with a standalone AO3 question on the evaluation of a laboratory environment. Only one question was more accessible than this on the whole paper (Q. 8 (c)(i)). It was extremely satisfying to see candidates using their knowledge of the location to create comparisons and strengths and weaknesses. As the only extended writing question, in section B, it was good to see candidates really engage with the material giving a wide range of relevant strengths and weaknesses. This question was a pleasure to mark. Q. 8 (b) again used an alternative format to ask about the ethical issue of deception. Here candidates had to explain why the nutritional psychologist might have justified the use of deception. Considering this was a new format, it was surprisingly well answered, with many candidates coming up with articulate and thoughtful responses as to why it would be ok to use active deception about the flavour/brand of crisps in a bowl. This type of question really tests the candidates understanding of ethics more deeply and it was genuinely a pleasure to see how many of them engaged in the material so thoughtfully. Q. 8 (c)(i) was the most accessible on the paper and required the candidates to justify whether a conclusion given by the psychologist was true or false using the data provided. This was very well answered, those who did not score full marks often only lost marks by not including the data in their responses, not because of a lack of understanding. Q. 8 (c)(ii) asked them to evaluate a weakness of using the mean. This was an AO3 question and did not require contextualisation. In past series this type of question has not been answered well, but this year candidates, with the help of their centres, have really improved, which is commendable. Q. 8 (d)(i) was a calculate the standard deviation question. As always, this is a 'marmite' question that candidates either love or hate. Those who attempted it did reasonably well, as always positive marking was used so that early errors were not carried forward. Q. 8 (d)(ii) had the lowest attempt rate of all questions and was the less well accessed on the paper. Candidates had to give an advantage of the standard deviation, in context. For those who did respond, a good number were able to give an appropriate advantage. However, this was an AO2 question, and as many of the candidates failed to contextualise their point, they were unable to score any marks. This reduced the average score considerably.
- Q.9 The final scenario started out with a simple define the term 'directional hypothesis' question. Much like in Q. 7 (b), there was a concerning amount of 'a hypothesis that is in a specific direction' type answers. Candidates should be reminded that they must use alternative language to define terminology e.g. using the word prediction for hypothesis or outcome for direction. Good responses referred to cause and effect, or the influence of IV on DV, or strength and direction of relationships between variables. Q. 9 (b) was the second least attempted on the paper, requiring candidates to identify and explain how the IV was operationalised in the scenario. Those who did attempt the question invariably either only identified the IV or explained just one condition/aspect, so did not score full marks. Q. 9 (c) potentially suffered from being the penultimate question on the paper. It was the second least well accessed question after Q. 8 (d)(ii).

Much like this previous question, many candidates were able to give both an appropriate strength and weakness of using a structured interview to collect data, but very few of them contextualised their answers and thus scored zero. Q. 9 (d) had the joint second lowest attempt rate (alongside Q. 9 (b)), perhaps because it was the final question. It asked for one ethical issue in the scenario and how it could be overcome. Both aspects had to be contextualised for full marks. Most who attempted this question were able to give an ethical issue in context (1 mark), but very few gave an appropriate way to deal with that issue, and those who did, failed to contextualise their solution.

PSYCHOLOGY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 3 – IMPLICATIONS IN THE REAL WORLD

Overview of the Unit

Many candidates produced some excellent responses across the paper, showing an impressive depth and breadth of knowledge. Most candidates seemed prepared for the different styles of question and there seemed to be improvement in the number of candidates who approached them using appropriate structures and relevant knowledge. There were specific improvements seen in the applications of explanations to specific behaviour the elaborated context seen in AO3 points and the standalone 5 mark application questions. Areas for improvement remain with combined skill question, for example AO2/3 questions where many candidates often did not address the statement/scenario or left it until the conclusion to refer to it. In addition, the controversies questions were generally not completed well again this year. Candidates were not addressing the questions set but were relying on pre-planned answers that missed the focus of the question and instead tended to be a generic 'outline of the use of non-human or scientific status of Psychology. Some missed the reference to therapeutic device or methodologies used by some approaches in psychology, so it was evident a lot of candidates did not read the question carefully.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 (a) This question asked for any one biological explanation. There were a small minority who wrote more than one, but the vast majority stuck to one, of which the most popular was the dopamine hypothesis. The more successful answers included key terminology, an in-depth description of the explanation and a clear link to addiction. Issues arose when candidates were vague in their outline, as there were 10 marks available for one explanation or missed out the clear link to explaining addiction.
- (b) This question required candidates to address at least two biological psychological explanations- when this was not done the candidate could not access the top bands (6-10 marks), there were a lot of generic biological answers as opposed to two separate explanations. In addition, the combination of application and evaluation was an issue with some candidates. Some struggled to refer to the scenario throughout their answer. There were multiple hooks in the scenario that should have given candidate multiple opportunities to apply their AO3 to it. Those who performed well gave a more detailed approach where every evaluative point was shaped to illustrate the explanation and scenarios and conclusions gave additional context to summarise the answer.

- Q.2 (a) Answer required two different explanations, the most popular being chosen were theory of mind and weak central coherence theory. The stronger answers outlined the two explanations with the use of clear terminology and how it explains ASD, with an additional link to the scenario of the youth worker. Weaker answers tended to give a general outline of explanations or gave limited reference to key terminology. In addition, there were some opportunities to link to scenario missed or a lot of name dropping of 'Lee the youth worker' as opposed to application.
- (b) This question required AO3 of RDI. There were some very impressive answers to this question, where candidates used a variety of points including; research that supports/refutes the effectiveness RDI, ethical issues and social implications. These higher scoring answers also included specific context to link points back to RDI and how effective/ethical it was at treating ASD. Where lower marks were gained, answers lack depth and range, were seen as generic in content and missed conclusions.
- Q.3 (a) This was the least popular option on the unit this year. This answer required at least one social psychological explanation to be outlined. Some candidates confused social and individual differences explanations. Cultural differences was the most popular answer given, but some pupils did not link this well to explain how it leads to bullying behaviour. Those that performed well on this question, like 1a, gave a clear and detailed outline, with clear terminology and links to explaining bullying behaviour.
- (b) There was generally a disappointing performance on this question. This is an application question that generates AO2 marks. It required candidates to apply individual differences explanations to modifying bullying behaviours. Therefore, those that did this well- gave an outline of the general or specific ways that individual differences explanations explain bullying behaviours and then made an explicit link between this cause and the way it could be modified. The most common link seen between narcissistic personality and CBT.
- Unfortunately, this type of answer was rarely seen and instead there were many answers that would outline a method of modification but with no application to an explanation. Here there is no application of how the method of modification actually helps modifies the behaviour that is caused via an individual differences explanation and so is effectively AO1.
- (c) The answer required candidates to evaluate any individual differences explanations of bullying behaviours. Many answers confused individual differences and social explanations, the ones named on the specification are cognitive biases, narcissistic personality and theory of mind. Where the correct explanation was used theory of mind was the most popular choice, however, there needed to be at least two individual differences explanations evaluated to access the top bands (6-10 marks). Good answers contained a range of evaluative points, with specific context to the theories, covered a range of strengths and weaknesses and finished with a conclusion that added to the answer.

- Q.4 (a) The question required candidates to outline the characteristics of crime. This could have been done in a number of ways; outlining the characteristics of the behaviour that need to be present to be considered a crime, the risk factors for criminal behaviours (genetic factors, prenatal factors, upbringing, exposure to violent models, birth trauma combined with early rejection, poverty, peer groups, use of drugs and alcohol, mental illness.) or the types of individuals (age, ethnicity) committing different types (white collar, violent etc.) of crime. The latter approach was by far the most popular and those that listed a variety of crimes with links to the types of individuals who commit this crime produced some impressive answers. Some candidates unfortunately merely defined crimes and different types of crime instead of focusing on the person who commits these crimes.
- (b) Like 3b, this is an application question that generates AO2 marks. It required candidates to apply biological explanations to modifying criminal behaviours. Therefore, those that did this well- gave an outline of the general or specific ways that biological explanations explain criminal behaviours and then made an explicit link between this cause and the way it could be modified. The most common link seen between the role of the amygdala and anger management. Issues that arose from this question included using explanations and method of modifying that had no clear link to each other, using method of modifying in the question that are not used as methods of modifying criminal behaviour.
- (c) An AO3 question that required candidates to evaluate a method of modifying criminal behaviour- most candidates chose either restorative justice or anger management. The question did require candidates to address 'effectiveness' and 'ethical and social implications' will not be able to access the two higher mark bands (6-8 and 9-10). This answer was done well when candidates refer to both of these elements, has specific context with relation to their chose method of modifying and concluded, using a conclusion that added to the answer and gave both strengths and weakness.
- Q.5 (a) The question asked for AO1 skills, to describe any two explanations of schizophrenia. The most popular answers outlined the dopamine hypothesis and the psychodynamic explanation. Stronger answers gave an outline of the explanations with reference to key terminology and also a clear link to how these explain schizophrenia. However, some candidates gave good outlines of the explanations but failed to actually relate it to criminal behaviour. In addition, there a few that wrote more than one explanation which compromised their depth.
- (b) Like question 1b, this question required candidates to address at least two biological psychological explanations- when this was not done the candidate could not access the top bands (6-10 marks), there were a lot of generic biological answers as opposed to two separate explanations. In addition, the combination of application and evaluation was an issue with some candidates. Some struggled to refer to the statement throughout their answer. There were multiple hooks in the statement, 'offer the best way of explaining', 'have more strengths than weaknesses', 'offer effective methods of modifying schizophrenia' and 'psychologists believe biological explanations may not offer a complete account'. These should have given candidate multiple opportunities to apply their AO3 to it. Those who performed well gave a more detailed approach where every evaluative point was shaped to illustrate the explanation and statement and conclusions gave additional context to summarise the answer.

- Q.6 (a) This question required both AO1 and AO3, this was done much better this year- where most candidates included both assessment skills and were better prepared at understanding how much detail to include in this type of question. Most popular answer was daily hassles.

Stronger answers gave an outline of the hassles/life changes, with examples. They then went onto outline how these hassles or changes linked to stress-making you more susceptible or resilient. Many students were able to explain this with the required depth and range. However, some candidates gave good outlines of the hassles/sources but failed to relate it to stress. In addition, there was some confusion seen between the social explanation and the individual differences explanations.

- (b) This question required both AO1 and AO3, most candidates included both assessment skills and seemed well prepared at understanding how much detail to include in this type of question. Most popular answer was adrenaline. Stronger answers used key terminology and linked the explanation specifically to stress. With regard to AO3- stronger answers included fewer points that were explained and clearly linked to the biological explanations as opposed to lots of points that were generic evaluation. No conclusions are required where AO3 is out of 5.
- (c) There were identical issues to previous similar answers, - many wrote a description of the MOM with no link to the explanation or a description of how it would correct the behaviour. The best answers chose a MOM which was clearly linked to an explanation or the explanations and gave detail regarding how the cause was tackled within the MOM. The most popular route was the hardiness and how this is linked to hardiness training.

- Q.7 As with previous years, there were a lot of pre learnt essays seen that did not address the question. This led to answers with long descriptions of issues without engagement with the question- instead misinterpreting it to be a generic 'psychology is unscientific, or it is scientific' question, as opposed to whether the methodologies used by some approaches in psychology are unscientific and this stops psychology from being regarded as a science. There was also a lack of evidence used to support or criticise points made. There also needs to be more emphasis on having a balanced argument/both sides of the debate. The higher scoring answers entered a debate regarding the statement and chose relevant research to illustrate the arguments on both sides, then finished with a conclusion that logically progressed from the answer and addressed the statement.

- Q.8 There were similar issues as seen in question 7; pre-learnt essays that did not address the question, long descriptions of studies without engagement with the question or answers or with no reference to research/theories or devices at all. Some answers tended to just outline different studies that used non-human animals and failed to link these to the question wording. In addition, the question required them to discuss the use of non-human animals in research and as a therapeutic device. The reference to therapeutic devices was at times missing or was the only part used. Again, this reflects that candidates need to read the question more carefully.

PSYCHOLOGY

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 4 – APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS

Overview of the Unit

Once again there was an impressive attempt rate across all questions. It was encouraging to see the contextualisation skill improving in response to both the personal investigations and novel scenarios.

The areas that candidates found more challenging in the paper this year included knowledge on how the validity was assessed in the quasi-experiment, justification for the inferential statistical test for the correlational study and the justification of why the mean was an appropriate measure of central tendency in the novel scenario. These areas of the specification should be a focus for improvement.

That being said, there has been a significant improvement in research methods knowledge and application since the previous series which is pleasing.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 (a) (i) This question was well attempted and accessible. Most candidates were able to fully explain how the independent variable was operationalised in their quasi-experiment and this was achieved by operationalising the age categories, for example, under 30 and over 30.
- (ii) This question was accessible and well attempted and most candidates were able to fully explain how the dependent variable was operationalised in their quasi-experiment by fully operationalising the measuring tool for sleep e.g. sleep tracker app measuring hours and minutes sleep over the course of a week.
- (b) This question was well answered and well attempted. Areas of improvements for this style of question would be to ensure the ethical issue is fully explained and not just identified and ensuring both the ethical issue and way of dealing with the issue is fully linked to the personal investigation.
- (c) (i) Generally, well answered question. However, some candidates lost marks on this question as they explained a way of assessing validity or explained an issue with the reliability of the investigation and not validity.
- (ii) This question was the least accessible across the paper and candidates struggled to explain how validity could be assessed in their quasi-experiment. This would be an area of improvement to work on to ensure candidates are familiar with the different ways of assessing validity with appropriate contextualisation to their personal investigation.

- (d) This question was assessing the AO3 evaluation skill and required no application to the personal investigation. Most candidates were able to evaluate a quasi-experiment and the better answers included fully elaborated evaluation points which explained why it was a strength or a weakness with appropriate use of terminology, for example, high ecological validity, low internal validity.
- Q.2 (a) Most candidates attempted to state the operationalised alternative hypothesis for their correlational study. However, there were some candidates who stated a null hypothesis and some who stated an experimental hypothesis both of which were not creditworthy. Those who did state an appropriate correlational hypothesis were mostly able to operationalise both co-variables.
- (b) (i) This question was very accessible and very well attempted. Most candidates were able to identify the graphical representation as scatter diagram.
- (ii) Although, part (i) was answered very well, part (ii) to this question was not answered as well and this was largely due to the lack of contextualisation to their correlational study. When being asked to justify their choice, it is important to do so in the context of their own personal investigation and not just give generic justifications of using a scatter diagram in research.
- (c) (i) This question was very accessible. Most candidates were able to identify an appropriate inferential statistical test.
- (ii) This question was less accessible and again the lack of contextualisation to the personal investigation hindered the marks gained for this question. Candidates must apply each justification for the inferential statistical test to their personal investigation. Generic, uncontextualised reasons for using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Co-efficient test were not creditworthy.
- (iii) This was better answered than 2(c)(ii) and a good proportion of candidates were able to explain which hypothesis was accepted due to the observed and critical values rule for the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Co-efficient test. The better answered referred to appropriate observed and critical values in their answers. The weaker answers either omitted the values or used inappropriate values for a correlational statistical test i.e. values greater than 1.
- (d) This was generally accessible to candidates and candidates were able to discuss how one change could improve the investigation. The better answers were able to fully discuss how the change would improve their study referring to appropriate terminology such as improve the external/internal validity/reliability.
- Q.3 (a) This was accessible to candidates and most were able to identify the level of measurement as ordinal.
- (b) Similar to the previous evaluation questions, the better answers were fully elaborated on and explained why it was a strength or weakness of an independent groups design using appropriate terminology.

- (c) (i) This was the most accessible question across the paper with a high proportion of candidates achieving full marks for calculating the mean score for the data set given.
 - (ii) Unfortunately, this question was less accessible than some of the other questions and candidates found it challenging to explain why the mean was an appropriate measure of central tendency in the context of the data set given in the novel scenario. Contextualisation to the novel scenario was lacking in response to this question which negatively impacted the mark awarded.
 - (d) This question was well attempted and well answered. Candidates were generally able to apply the observed and critical value rule for the Mann Whitney U test appropriately to accept the alternative hypothesis and reject the null. This skill has improved significantly across the examination series.
 - (e) As with previous questions on confounding variables, there was a mixed response. Those candidates who explained how a confounding variable could affect the investigation were able to do so well with appropriate contextualisation. However, there are still a number of candidates getting extraneous and confounding variables muddled. Candidates should make it clear within their answer that confounding variables only affect an individual or some individuals and not all. Therefore, appropriate wording should be used 'a participant/an individual' or 'some participants NOT 'participants' or 'they' as this could refer to all participants equally.
 - (f) This was the most accessible of the evaluation (AO3) questions and candidates were able to do a good job in evaluating a strength and weakness of a lab experiment. Again, appropriate terminology and elaboration were key to achieving full marks.
- Q.4
- (a) (i) This was the most accessible question on the paper and the most attempted question with a very large proportion of candidates achieving full marks as they were successfully able to identify the data as qualitative.
 - (ii) Both well attempted and well answered. The discriminating factor in marks for this question was application to the novel scenario and the level of explanation. The better answered were able to fully explain why the data was qualitative linking to the scenario.
 - (b) This wasn't as well answered as some of the other questions and the explanations of ways of assessing reliability were not always accurate. For example, some explanations used test-retest with different participants from other colleges which was inaccurate. The better answers used test-retest appropriately, for example, testing the same 50 A Level students a month later to see if their happiness scores on the questionnaire were consistent.
 - (c) This question was well attempted. The better answers were able to explain how social desirability could have affected the validity of the study with appropriate contextualisation. Some candidates confused social desirability bias with demand characteristics and the answers that explained demand characteristics were not creditworthy.

- (d) Generally, well answered as candidates were able to give one appropriate advantage of using an interview rather than a questionnaire such as clarification of questions, interpretation of body language etc.
- (e) As with previous evaluation questions the better answers fully elaborated on the strength and weakness of random sampling using appropriate terminology. There were a noticeable number of answers referring to random sampling as a quick and easy method without appropriate comparison to other named sampling techniques and therefore were not creditworthy.

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