



GCE Examiners' Report

Psychology
AS and A Level
Summer 2024

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	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised 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. 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.	For unitised 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.

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
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Executive Summary

Examining teams across the AS and A level units were generally pleased with the quality of work produced by candidates in Summer 2024.

In Unit 1, Many candidates effectively addressed questions using examples and terminology, especially in assumptions and evaluations. However, they need support to improve their AO2 application skills on different styles of questions. Some candidates lack relevant knowledge and understanding, and some mix up classic research, resulting in lower marks for these questions.

In Unit 2, the standard of research methods knowledge for AS Psychology was good, with no one assessment objective being answered better than another. Candidates had a sound understanding of research methods terminology and were able to use it in context. High attempt rates were evident, a credit to the effort and engagement of all involved in training candidates. Candidates found evaluating measures of central tendency and applying specific forms of validity challenging. The contemporary debate was popular, with high standards of evidence and improved arguments compared to last year.

In Unit 3, candidates demonstrated a good depth and range of knowledge, with improvements in selecting relevant information and understanding theories/therapies across the various behaviors in Section A. However, there are still common issues that cause problems in this series, as in previous years, such as struggling to access top mark bands in standalone AO2 questions, not addressing statements in AO2/AO3 questions, and relying on pre-planned answers that missed the focus of the question.

In Unit 4, there was a high attempt rate across all questions, but although AO2 skills have improved slightly, they are still lacking in some questions and therefore impacting the marks awarded. Candidates should be reminded to expand on evaluation points and use appropriate terminology to increase internal validity. Some good answers for question 4(e) demonstrated a clear understanding of inferential statistics and justified which hypothesis should be accepted and rejected with appropriate reference to observed and critical values. It would be beneficial for centers to focus on the command word in the question and the skill being assessed, as some candidates justified their choice of descriptive statistics instead of evaluating them, hindering their marks. A focus on the level of measurement would also be useful for candidates, particularly examples of what type of data would produce different levels of measurement. For example, the scenario in question 4 showed that ratio data was presented as time has a fixed zero and equal units of measurement.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Classic research: Raine et al (1997)	5.0 Raine's research Biological approach - Blended Learning (d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net)	Blended learning resource
	'Raine' pdf Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser.
	'A summary of Brain abnormalities in murderers indicated by positron emission tomography by Raine, A., Buchsbaum, M. and LaCasse, L. (1997)' pdf Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Psychology journal summaries
Measures of central tendency	2.0 Measures of central tendency Descriptive Statistics - Blended Learning (d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net)	Blended learning resource
	'Descriptive Statistics' pdf Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser
Validity	1.0 Validity https://d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net/el20-21_6-21	Blended learning resource
	'Validity' pdf Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser
Standalone AO2 questions from Unit 3 Section A	Slides 91-98 of 'WJEC GCE Psychology Online Feedback Autumn 16.10.2023 PPTX' Located in 'WJEC GCE Psychology Feedback on summer assessments Online CPD Material Autumn 2023' on Portal.	Examples of answers to standalone AO2 questions from Summer 2023
Level of measurement	1.0 Levels of measurement Levels of measurement - Blended Learning (d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net)	Blended learning resource
	'Levels of measurement' pdf Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser

PSYCHOLOGY

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UNIT 1 – PAST TO PRESENT

Overview of the Unit

The examining team would like to congratulate candidates on some excellent responses across a wide range of questions. Many candidates were able to fully address the question appropriately and use examples and terminology to add detail to their responses or to illustrate their arguments. This was particularly true in assumptions questions and when evaluating the approaches. Moving forward, candidates would benefit from support in improving their AO2 (application) skills on different styles of these questions. Despite demonstrating relevant knowledge and understanding, many are not applying this to answer the question that has been set. There are also some candidates who are mixing up different parts of classic research and therefore not achieving marks for these questions.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 (a)(i)** Most candidates were able to identify some features of this assumption, describing the 3 parts of the iceberg analogy with accurate use of terminology. As in previous years, many candidates did not include a clear link to psychology, which limited the marks available. To access the full range of marks, candidates should include how the assumption can be used to explain behaviour. This can be a particular behaviour, therapy or piece of research from another part of the specification. In this case, some candidates successfully used the example of defence mechanisms being linked to psychological problems or explained how the use of dream analysis shows the role of the unconscious in our behaviour.
- (a)(ii)** Most candidates were able to accurately identify the 3 parts of the tripartite personality and describe them in detail using appropriate terminology. Occasionally candidates mixed up the function of each part, for example mixing up the ego and superego. As with the previous question, the marks awarded to some candidates was limited by the lack of an example linked to psychology. The best answers explained the processes of ego conflict and then went on to explain how this might influence behaviour, such as a dominant id linked to criminality or the role of the superego in creating neuroses. It is important that candidates are reminded of the importance of including and fully explaining an example in questions such as these.

- (b)** There were some very good answers to this question where students evaluated the approach using a range of appropriate themes such as determinism and the nature/nurture debate. Most candidates were able to cover both strengths and weaknesses and use examples from the psychodynamic approach to illustrate their argument and make the answer more relevant to the context. For example, explaining the difficulties in objectively researching the unconscious mind when discussing the scientific status of the approach. The best answers were then able to explain why these examples could be seen as either a strength or weakness of the approach and therefore add depth to their evaluation discussion. This then allowed the candidates to access the higher mark bands. Some candidates muddled up evaluation points such as determinism and reductionism or were not able to explain successfully why something was a strength or weakness.
- Q.2** Most candidates were able to make reference to a suitable explanation for relationship formation using an assumption from the behaviourist approach. Many referred to the role of different types of conditioning in the formation of romantic relationships or in mother/child attachment formation through food. The main difference in answers was in the use of appropriate terminology. The best answers named the different types of conditioning involved (classical and operant) and were able to accurately apply terms like positive reinforcement or neutral stimulus to the example they were giving. Those using the blank slate assumption often struggled to give enough detail and explanation to access the higher mark bands.
- Q.3** There were some very impressive answers to this question where candidates were able to give an accurate and detailed description of findings from the study, giving examples from different sessions. For example, they covered Albert's reaction to the rat along with his response to different stimuli and when the environment was changed. They also covered smaller details like his response to the wooden blocks. Some answers were limited by only covering one aspect of the study (e.g. just the first few joint stimulations with the rat). Other answers covered more on procedures (the actions of Watson and Rayner) than findings (Little Albert's response) and therefore did not address the requirements of the question.
- Q.4 (a)** This is an AO2 question and requires candidates to apply their knowledge of the assumptions to the therapy from the approach. The ideal way to approach this question was to consider why a biological psychologist, based on their assumptions about behaviour, would view one of these therapies as the most appropriate method to choose. Many candidates chose to evaluate the therapy instead (a skill that was assessed in the next question), talking about effectiveness and ethics and therefore not fully addressing the requirements of the question. Some also just described components of the therapies, again not explaining how this demonstrated a biological psychologists view that the therapy was appropriate. Where candidates did address the question, they referred to biological processes (such as localisation of brain function or neurotransmission), explained how these might cause a psychological problem and then went on to explain how the therapy addressed these biological processes as a form of treatment. It would be useful for centres to practice this type of question with candidates to ensure that it is addressed in the appropriate way.

- (b)** This question was generally well answered with many candidates able to evaluate the therapy covering both strengths and weaknesses. Some answers were limited by only discussing ethical issues (particularly when evaluating psychosurgery) and weaker answers did not include research evidence when evaluating effectiveness. The use of research helps to add depth and develop the evaluation beyond the basic mark band. Sometimes research studies were included but could have been used more effectively as evaluation by discussing what they demonstrated about the effectiveness of the therapy. It should be noted that some candidates evaluated the use of placebos in research studies, and this did not really address the question as it was not an evaluation of drug therapy itself. The best answers used examples and research as thorough evaluation and drew conclusions about the use of the therapy they were evaluating.
- Q.5 (a)** Most candidates were able to correctly identify an assumption and give some explanation. There was variation in the accurate use of specialist terminology which affected the marks given. For example, some did not accurately describe the pleasant, good and meaningful life for the 'good life' assumption. As with questions 1 (a) (i) and 1(a) (ii), some candidates did not include an example from psychology, which limited their marks. Many made successful use of mindfulness as an example for free will or specific research evidence for the others. It can be useful to use examples from other parts of the specification here as it reduces the amount of new information the candidates have to learn.
- (b)** The best comparisons used overarching concepts such as scientific status or acknowledgement of free will as their similarity. They were then able to include relevant examples from each approach to give relevance to the context and fully illustrate the similarity. However, as this question is assessing AO3, to achieve full marks candidates needed to include some discussion of the similarity they chose. Unfortunately, this was missing from many of the responses. For example, if commenting on the shared use of the scientific method they could have suggested that this was a strength of both approaches as it added credibility to their ideas.
- Q.6** There was some excellent knowledge of the components shown in this question with most answers able to identify and give some description of each one. For answers on CBT this usually included reference to dysfunctional thought diaries, restructuring and pleasant activity scheduling. For REBT, reference was made to the ABCDE model and mustabatory thinking. Although many answers had some accurate description, they were not always explained in enough depth and examples to access the higher marks. It is also important that the components are explained with links to the therapeutic process such as demonstrating how the thoughts being challenged can help to treat a particular psychological problem.
- Q.7** Many candidates were able to identify social implications of Loftus and Palmer's research such as the impact on police questioning techniques and miscarriages of justice. As this was an AO2 question, specific links to the quote were required to access the highest marks. This is an important skill to practice as preparation for using this skill in Unit 3. Some candidates just described the study or referred to ethical issues. As social implications are named on the specification candidates should be able to report on these specifically.

- Q.8** This question required candidates to describe the conclusions of Raine et al's (1997) research using the original article as the basis for the answer. Overall, this was poorly answered by many candidates. Unfortunately, there were many answers that included findings only and therefore did not address the question. Candidates needed to ensure that where they referred to specific brain differences, they talked about applying this to murderers more generally (conclusions) rather than just referring to the NGRI sample from the study (findings). The best answers used comments from the article about what it demonstrated about the cause of violent behaviour and some of the limitations of the research.
- Q.9** Many candidates were able to identify relevant ethical issues (both strengths and weaknesses) and discuss them with links to mindfulness. Most answers considered issues such as psychological harm and some looked at the ethics of availability of mindfulness and the number of untrained therapists. When discussing mindfulness, some candidates wrote responses that sounded more like an evaluation of CBT (for example talking about the challenging rather than acceptance of thoughts) which limited marks awarded. There were also some candidates who included effectiveness evaluation, which was not credited as this was not a requirement of the question.

PSYCHOLOGY

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UNIT 2 – USING PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

Overview of the Unit

This year 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. Centres should be very proud of their candidates and what they have been able to achieve in less than a year of teaching. Overall, candidates had a sound understanding of research methods terms and were able to use them in context. Unlike previous series, there did not seem to be a specific term or area in which most candidates struggled. 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. Much like previous series, candidates find evaluating measures of central tendency and applying specific forms of validity (particularly internal validity – Q.9 (d)) the most challenging. This year the contemporary debate (relating to the reliability of eye-witness testimony) 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 an improvement on those seen last year.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1** This question was well answered and attempted by the majority of candidates; reliability of eye-witness testimony is clearly a firm favourite. Themes discussed invariably included questioning technique, the age of the witness and the role of emotion (some also included the role of a weapon). Better answers had detail about the findings of research from within these themes and explicit evaluation of that research. Arguments that used a to-and-fro structure tended to score more highly than those answers that tackled one side of the debate before switching to the other without making many comparisons. It was encouraging to see more candidates using social and economic implications of inaccurate eyewitness testimony as part of their arguments. This is good practice and often lifted answers into the higher mark bands.
- Q.2** This was a new type of questioning style for this unit, asking candidates to identify three different graphical representations (bar, line and scatter graph). It was well answered with many candidates gaining all three marks.
- Q.3** It was pleasing to see that some candidates had a good grasp of confounding variables. Those who failed to achieve both marks invariably did so due to a lack of clarity or exemplification in their response to show why/how a confounding variable might jeopardise results.

- Q.4** Most candidates were able to identify at least one feature of Kohlberg's participants. Most stated that they were all male and provided the age ranges of the boys used in the study to gain full marks. Those who identified that they were all American failed to score a second mark unless they specifically stated that the original American sample was then followed up with cross cultural comparisons from countries such as Germany, Turkey etc.
- Q.5** Most candidates attempted to provide at least one strength and weakness of quasi-experiments. Those who only provided two points often struggled to achieve the depth and range required of the top mark band. The question was well attempted, but the majority achieved scores in the 'reasonable' mark band. A small minority of candidates evaluated the laboratory 'location' rather than focusing on quasi-experiments as a specific method and gained very little credit as a result. Those candidates who focused on reliability and validity of the method achieved higher scores. The Q.6 best responses were also able to evaluate the fact that the method allows for the study of independent variables that would be unethical for psychologists to purposefully manipulate.
- Q.6** Almost all candidates were able to describe qualitative and quantitative data – those who failed to achieve marks only did so if they did not make a comparison between the two, with the use of an appropriate connective (whereas/however etc.) or a specific example to show the difference between quantitative and qualitative data.
- Q.7** Successful candidates focused primarily on risks to Milgram's participants, beliefs, values and relationships as a result of the deception they underwent in his obedience research. A smaller number criticised the risk to privacy through his recording and later publication of videos of participants in distress. There were, however, a significant number of candidates who talked about risk of psychological and/or physical harm to participants. Those candidates failed to attract any marks.
- Q.8** Question 8 was made up of six AO2 questions that all focused on a questionnaire methodology related to a novel scenario looking at the thrill-seeking nature of drivers caught speeding.
- (a)** Required the creation of a null hypothesis. This part was particularly well answered with a significant number of candidates achieving full marks. Invariably, the only time candidates did not receive full marks is when they provided an experimental/alternative hypothesis instead of a null. This is an area of real strength on the paper and many candidates are to be commended for their application of their knowledge.
- (b)** Included three separate AO2 questions that focused specifically on systematic sampling. Almost all candidates could explain how the sample was selected in context (i); most were also able to evaluate one strength of the technique (ii); but fewer were able to evaluate an appropriate weakness (iii). A common misconception was that systematic samples are 'random'. This is not the case (the nature of the system negates randomisation) and comments to this end were not credited when used as either a strength or a weakness of the technique. The primary reason, however, that candidates did not score full marks on parts (ii) and (iii) was that correct responses were not contextualised to the novel scenario. It is recommended that a way that candidates could be encouraged to contextualise is by naming the researcher using the scenario (e.g. the criminal psychologist) or the participants (e.g. drivers) to ensure a link is present.

- (c) Almost all candidates were able to give a conclusion based on the data presented. We saw fewer inferential conclusions this year, showing that centres are training their candidates well for this type of question. Candidates often only lost marks if they did not fully contextualise their conclusion using the data from Figure 1.
- (d) Required candidates to give a strength and weakness of the mean, in context. Candidates found this question difficult, as they have historically. Those who did give appropriate evaluative points often failed to contextualise them, which was a real shame as they'd done most of the hard work and just fell at the final hurdle.

Q.9 Question 9 was made up of two AO1 questions and three AO2 questions focused on an observation in a laboratory setting that involved humans and their animal companions (cats) in different stages.

- (a) Whilst AO1 was generally better accessed than AO2, candidates often misinterpreted part (a) describing the features of laboratory-based experiments rather than features of the laboratory environment (as a location for research). Whilst some of the features overlap (e.g. control of conditions) very few candidates who described the features of laboratory-based experiments managed to gain marks beyond the superficial mark band. Better answers talked about validity and replicability or made comparisons to alternative locations e.g. the field.
- (b) In part (b) a much larger number of candidates were able to describe an ethical guideline that must be followed when working with animals than when this was last included in the 2019 series. It was very pleasing to see that many candidates are aware of the 3Rs and the requirements regarding the care of animals when they are not being tested. It is fair to say, however, that a significant number of candidates did believe that psychologists are not allowed to harm or cause any distress to animals in psychological research. This was not creditworthy.
- (c) Part (c) was well attempted, with candidates generally knowing how a snowball sample is selected and referring to the cat owners at least once. The majority of candidates, however, failed to achieve full marks as their contextualisation was only partial e.g. they referred to cat owners at the beginning, but gave no further elaboration in relation to collection of the snowball sample in context.
- (d) Part (d) was perhaps the most difficult question on the paper for candidates to access. This was primarily because answers, in the main, referred to issues of external validity rather than internal validity. For example, a significant proportion of responses stated that the environment (the lab) was unrealistic and did not demonstrate true behaviour of cats at home. Many responses were extremely imaginative, from smelly owners to grumpy cats, but confounding variables were only creditworthy if they related to differences between the three stages that were being tested (e.g. the cat was fed at the beginning of stage 1 but was hungry again by stage 3 impacting their interactions/relationship with their owner).

Many candidates failed to grasp the fact that the scenario was testing differences in the cat 'behaviour' when the owner was in or outside of the room, therefore a grumpy cat would be grumpy in all three stages and would not jeopardise internal validity. Answers that gained credit primarily focused on researcher bias from the two psychologists observing, or social desirability from the cat owners.

- (e) A small but notable number of candidates misinterpreted part (e), which asked why operationalisation of a variable (stress response) would be important. Answers given included being aware of what 'stress' is, so that the researchers could prevent harm. This was not creditworthy. Good answers referred to the importance of being able to measure and compare the stress responses of cats across the three stages.

Q.10 Question 10 was made up of six AO2 questions and one AO3 question. The scenario focused on the impact of taking photos on participants' memories of sculptures they viewed in an art gallery.

- (a) Part (a) was well attempted with almost all candidates who attempted the question gaining at least one out of the two marks available by selecting an independent groups design. Those who failed to achieve the second mark did so because they did not contextualise their response to the two conditions given in the scenario.
- (b) Part (b) required candidates to explain how the psychologist might have gained valid consent in context. This required 2 elements, both of which had to be contextualised to gain full marks. Firstly, the idea of consent (agreement) had to be explained, secondly, the idea that the consent was valid (that they knew the true aims) needed to be included for the explanation to be considered reasonable. Most candidates were able to give at least basic explanations of consent, fewer provided contextualisation.
- (c) Part (c) required candidates to calculate the range of scores for 'group one' in (i); and the modal score for 'group two' in (ii); before asking for an advantage of the mode in (iii) (an AO3 skill). If candidates selected the correct data and showed their working (e.g. indicating the highest and lowest scores for range) they gained full marks for parts (i) and (ii). These questions were highly accessible. In part (iii), a reasonable number of candidates were able to correctly select an appropriate advantage of the mode, most focused on the fact that it is not skewed by anomalies, but very few elaborated their evaluation point to fully explain why this was advantageous (e.g. it is more representative).
- (d) Part (d) focused on an issue of validity. This time the type of validity was not specified and, as such, it was much accessed more easily by candidates than Q.9 (d). Again, lots of imaginative responses were seen, which is very encouraging as it means they are engaging with the scenarios and truly applying their psychological knowledge. Researcher bias, confounding variables based on memory that may have impacted their ability to recall the sculptures (rather than taking photos or not), distractions in the gallery etc. were all creditworthy. Candidates who did not achieve full marks often failed to do so if they did not fully explain the issue they had identified, in terms of the effects it may have had on the results of the study.

- (e)** Part (e) required candidates to draw and label a bar chart. This type of question is always well answered, and a significant number of candidates achieved full marks. It is pleasing to see that most candidates now include a title, but this is still the most common area where candidates lose marks, either because it is absent, or the title given is non-sensical for the data being displayed.

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UNIT 3 – IMPLICATIONS IN THE REAL WORLD

Overview of the Unit

There were some impressive answers to many of the questions, with candidates demonstrating good depth and range of knowledge. Most candidates seemed prepared for this unit where some of the good features included improvements in candidates' ability to gauge enough selective information where AOs were set at 5 marks and not overwriting, selecting relevant information for the question set and with regards to AO1 there were some outstanding illustrations of knowledge and understanding of theories/therapies across a range of behaviours. However, there were some common issues that need to be highlighted that seem to cause problems most years. Standalone AO2 only questions- although I think the attempt at application was definitely better than last year, candidates are still struggling to access top mark bands due to a lack of application. In AO2/AO3 questions- this was a particular issue- where candidates often did not address the statement or left it until the conclusion to even refer to it. In AO3 questions where at least two explanations were required there were a lot of candidates who generally evaluated explanations, which only generated basic answers at best and at times there was a lot of unnecessary describing in these questions which was not creditworthy. Unfortunately, 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 ethical issues or comments on how psychology is sexist' answers. 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 the description of the characteristics of addiction. Most candidates had excellent knowledge of the characteristics and were able to identify and describe them in some detail. However, most used Griffiths (2005) six factors that should be considered for a behaviour to become an addiction, but some chose only to include some of these. Another problem that occurred is that some candidates purely defined what an addiction is as opposed to focussing on the characteristics.

(b) The combination of application and evaluation was an issue with some candidates on this question. Some struggled to refer to the statement throughout their answer. This question required candidates to address at least two social psychological explanations- when this was not done the candidate could not access the top bands (6-10 marks). In addition, some answers evaluated social psychological explanations generally which meant their response was very generic. Also, conclusions could do with some focus; there was a lot of repetition of themes from the entire answer rather than adding anything new. Finally, there were a few occasions where candidates started the answer explaining the explanations first (AO1), which gained no credit. Those who performed well gave a more detailed approach where every evaluative point was shaped to illustrate the explanation and statement and the conclusion(s) gave additional context to summarise the answer.

Q.2 (a) This question required AO1 skill only and specifically PECs. Stronger answers tended to explain how the therapy modified autistic spectrum behaviour and included references to the stages involved in the processes. Weaker answers tended to give a general outline of what happened during the therapy without references to how it modifies the behaviours seen in autistic spectrum behaviour. There was also plenty of missed opportunities for the use of key terminology as many candidates did not name the stages used.

(b) This question required AO3 only and more than one individual differences explanation. There was some confusion between the individual differences explanations and social psychological explanations, with many using the latter, which was not creditworthy. In addition, similar to Q.1 (b), some candidates were generally evaluating individual differences explanations as opposed to evaluating at least two different explanations. Other issues seen included generic points being used without any specific context which led to a lot of listed AO3 points that did not move beyond 'basic'. Finally, the need for conclusions that add something to the answer needs to be addressed as many were missing or were a repetition of the answer already given. The better answers gave both strengths and weakness of at least 2 different explanations, which contained specific context of the explanations it was evaluating and an overall conclusion that added to the answer.

(c) 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 autistic spectrum behaviours. Therefore, those that did this well- gave an outline of the general or specific ways that individual differences explanations explain autistic spectrum behaviours and then made an explicit link between this cause and the way it could be modified e.g. RDI/Joint Attention. 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. Where there is no application of how the method of modification actually helps modify autistic spectrum behaviour that is linked to an individual differences explanation, the answer is effectively AO1. Additionally, other issues with this question included those that attempted to apply an explanation with a method of modifying but there was no direct link to explain how.

- Q.3 (a)** This question asked for AO1 skills; to describe any two explanations of bullying behaviour and AO2 skills which required the explanations to be linked to the scenario. Some candidates did not address that 10 of the 15 marks were AO1 and only 5 were AO2 and so did not address the AO1 content in the level of detail that was required and missed opportunities to include key terminology. Most students did use two explanations but there were occasions where more than two were used; the examining team assessed all explanations and gave credit to the best two, but it would have led to candidates wasting their time on writing the additional explanations. Better answers engaged with the scenario, using specific examples regarding Sam's behaviour to illustrate the explanations, however some candidates only name-dropped Sam throughout their answer, which would not have gained many AO2 marks.
- (b)** This answer required at least two separate social psychological explanations to be evaluated. Some candidates confused social psychological and individual differences explanations. Quite a few of these were vaguely answered and for some it was evident that the points were very generic and lacked key reference to any context of any social psychological explanation. Others may have included one or two well written points but were not able to go much further than that. Unfortunately, like questions 1 (b) and 2 (b), many candidates on this question wrote a general evaluation of social psychological explanations, which again were very generic. Those candidates that performed well on this question used at least two clearly identified social psychological explanations, used both strengths and weaknesses that include specific context to illustrate the evaluative point and an overall conclusion that added something of value to the answer.
- Q.4 (a)** This question required both AO1 and AO3; most candidates included both assessment skills and seemed better prepared than previous series at understanding how much detail to include in this type of question. Stronger answers tended to explain how restorative justice modified criminal behaviour and prevented reoffending and included more key terminology, such as atonement or rehabilitation. Weaker answers tend to outline what happened during restorative justice but failed to address how it modified criminal behaviours. With regard to AO3, stronger answers included fewer points that were explained and clearly linked to restorative justice as opposed to lots of points that were generic evaluation. No conclusions are required where AO3 is out of 5.
- (b)** Many answers were written well, specifically, candidates referred to how this explanation led to criminal behaviour and used key terminology such as the processes of observational learning, role models and imitation. The AO3 in this question was generally done well. Candidates seemed far better prepared to use both depth and context in their points. There was an issue that occurred a few times when pupils were using alternatives to evaluate these explanations, such as the biological explanations but ended up just explaining these explanations rather than using them for evaluation.

- (c) Again, there were notable issues with answers to this question. Many confused social psychological and individual differences explanations. However, many candidates that were able to correctly identify an individual differences explanation and even a method of modifying were unable to link them; instead, many candidates wrote a description of the explanation and then separately a description of the method of modifying with no explanation of how it would correct the behaviour. The best answers chose a method of modifying which was clearly linked to an explanation, or described the explanations and gave detail regarding how the cause was tackled within the method of modifying.
- Q.5 (a)** Another question that required both AO1 and AO3, where most candidates included both skills and were better prepared at understanding how much to include in this type of question. However, there were some issues with rubric in this question, which arose from the way candidates structured their answers. There were also some incidences where dysfunctional families and schizophrenogenic mother were muddled and some answers lacked a direct link to schizophrenia.
- (b) This question also required both AO1 and AO3, however, the same issues arose as with question 4(a). Weaker answers tended to miss how the use of Cognitive Behaviour therapy led to a reduction in schizophrenic symptoms, how they worked/modified the behaviour and instead presented lots of information on the stages without a link to schizophrenia, in fact some answers read like they were referring to depression, rather than Schizophrenia. There was opportunity for a lot of key terminology in answers to this question, which was missed by many candidates. With regard to AO3, stronger answers included fewer points that were explained well and clearly linked to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy's effectiveness or relation to ethical issues, as opposed to lots of generic evaluation.
- (c) Responses to this question displayed the same issues as noted in 2 (c) and 4 (c). Many candidates wrote a description of the method of modifying with no link to the explanation or a description of how it would correct the behaviour. The best answers chose a method of modifying which was clearly linked to an explanation or the explanations and gave detail regarding how the cause was tackled within the method of modifying. The most popular route was the dopamine hypothesis and how this is linked to antipsychotic drugs.
- Q.6 (a)** This question asked candidates to display AO1 skills, to describe any two individual differences explanations of stress. The most popular answers outlined the Type A and Hardiness personalities. Stronger answers gave an outline of both personalities, with examples of characteristics. They then went onto outline how these characteristics 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 personalities but failed to relate it to stress. In addition, there was some confusion seen between the social psychological explanation and the individual differences explanations.

(b) Again, the combination of application and evaluation was an issue for some candidates on this question, where they struggled to refer to the statement throughout their answer. This question required candidates to address at least two biological explanations, when this was not done the candidate could not access the top bands; unfortunately, this issue affected a notable proportion of candidates. In addition, some very generic answers were written where candidates would evaluate biological explanations without much reference to stress, let alone the specific biological explanations. Finally, conclusions displayed a lot of repetition of the entire answer rather than adding anything new. Those who performed well gave a more detailed approach where every evaluative point was shaped to illustrate the two separate explanations and conclusions gave additional context to summarise the answer.

Q.7 This question was attempted by slightly more candidates than question 8. As with previous years, there were a lot of pre-learned 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 'sexism in psychology' question, as opposed to whether other aspects of psychology, aside from gender bias was still a problem. Many answers had limited reference to research or theories, it is disappointing that students are still unable to include much appropriate evidence for the answer. There also needs to be more emphasis on having a balanced argument, with both sides of the debate. A large majority of candidates argued how sexism is still a problem without any consideration of the other side of the argument, that it is reducing. 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.

Q8. As with question 7, candidate responses to question 8 also displayed pre-learned 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 approaches at all. Some answers tended to just outline different unethical studies and failed to link these to the question wording. There seemed to be a lot of confusion around researcher's names and linking them to incorrect studies e.g. Myers and Diener being responsible for carrying out the research on Little Albert. The debate should have been centred on the benefits of unethical research which could include: the positive impact of Watson and Raynor or Bowlby in the forms of treatments or childcare policies. On the other side, candidates then should have considered the negative consequences, such as to the individual participants or effects of socially sensitive research. Similar to last year, there was also some incidences where candidates used animal studies in their answers; this is not creditworthy for this question.

PSYCHOLOGY

GCE

Summer 2024

UNIT 4 – APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS

Overview of the Unit

Overall, it was impressive to see such a high attempt rate across all questions. There were very few questions with no attempt to respond, which is encouraging.

Although the AO2 skills across the paper have improved slightly on the last examination series, it is still lacking across some questions and therefore having a notable impact on marks awarded. There are examples of good psychological knowledge being presented in answers, but they fail to signpost application to either the personal investigation or novel scenario which means they are not credited.

The AO3 skill could also be improved by appropriate elaboration on evaluation points, candidates should be reminded to expand on why something is a strength/weakness and use appropriate terminology whilst doing so e.g. *this increases internal validity*.

It was encouraging to see some good answers for question 4(e) when answers demonstrated a clear understanding of the inferential statistics part of the specification and were able to appropriately justify which hypothesis should be accepted and rejected with appropriate reference to the observed and critical values.

It would be useful for centres to focus on the command word in the question and the skill being assessed. For example, for some evaluation questions such as 1(d) where it was asking to evaluate the descriptive statistics used in the investigation and instead some candidates justified their choice of descriptive statistic instead of evaluating them which hindered their marks.

A focus on level of measurement would be useful for candidates particularly examples of what type of data would produce the different levels of measurement. For example, the scenario in question 4 was clearly presenting ratio data as time has a fixed zero and equal units of measurement.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 (a)(i)** This question was accessible to most candidates and candidates were able to identify the experimental design for their experiment on a context dependent memory task. It was well attempted and well answered.
- (a)(ii)** This question, although well attempted by candidates, was not as well answered as (a)(i). Candidates struggled to justify the choice of experimental design and instead simply explained why it was the experimental design identified in (a)(i). For example, it was an independent groups design as there was one group that took part in condition 1 and another group that took part in condition 2. Whereas we were looking for justification e.g. to reduce order effects. The candidates who did successfully justify also needed application to their experiment to gain credit.
- (b)** Almost all candidates attempted this question. Candidates needed to clearly operationalise both variables for the two marks and this is where some candidates lost marks as they clearly operationalised the DV but not the IV. The context dependent variable was not always made clear.
- (c)(i)** This question was well attempted. However, this question was addressing the location of research section of the specification and some candidates failed to identify laboratory environment/field/on-line and instead identified the classroom or playground etc. Unfortunately, this did mean some candidates lost a mark on this question.
- (c)(ii)** This question was a justification question and was assessing the AO2 skill. Some candidates are still not applying their answer to their investigation and this affects marks on all AO2 questions in Section A. The better answers justified the location of research, for example laboratory environment as it allows control over extraneous variables and then applied that justification to their investigation e.g. allowed us to control the noise by conducted during lesson time to reduce noise in corridors and shutting all the windows in the classroom meaning that the internal validity would be increased.
- (d)** This was an evaluation question and therefore the skill assessed was AO3. When candidates did evaluate the descriptive statistics, it was done well, and candidates were able to give appropriate strengths and weaknesses of the measures of central tendency and/or the measures of dispersion. Some candidates either discussed their descriptive statistics findings or justified the choice of descriptive statistics and didn't gain credit for evaluating them.
- (e)** This question was well attempted by all candidates. This question assessed the AO2 skill and where candidates lost marks in this question was a lack of application to the investigation when discussing the issue of validity and/or the way of dealing with that issue. The better answers were able to explain the relevant issue of validity and link that issue to their investigation and explain an appropriate way of managing the risk posed with the issue of validity and link the way of managing the risk posed by that issue to their investigation.

- Q.2 (a)** This question was well attempted. The question asks to reference the observational sampling technique used, and candidates didn't always appropriately reference event or time sampling. However, most were able to explain how the data was collected for the non-participant observation. The better answers clearly referenced event or time sampling and went on to clearly explain how this was done in the context of their investigation. Some candidates misinterpreted the question and explained their sampling technique such as opportunity and this was not creditworthy.
- (b)** This question was well attempted. However, the question wasn't particularly well answered and the reason for this is a lack of application. The question is an AO2 question and therefore needs application to the non-participant observation. A lot of responses read more as a definition of a way of assessing reliability rather than an explanation of how reliability could be assessed in their non-participant observation. The better answers were able to explain how reliability could be assessed using inter-rater or test-retest, for example, with appropriate reference to the investigation, such as the time span of test-retest e.g. a month later.
- (c)** Candidates were mostly able to give at least one finding from the descriptive statistics. The better answers gave two clear findings such as mean number of males texting and mean number of females texting.
- (d)** This was an AO3 question, and the better answers gave a thorough discussion of why the change would improve the investigation. The weaker answers focused on what was wrong with the investigation and then stated an improvement without discussing why that change would improve the investigation. I think it's important to remember for these questions that elaboration is key. For example, if a candidate suggests changing the sampling technique, then discuss why this would improve the investigation e.g. to make it a more representative sample or to limit bias and therefore increasing population validity. Appropriate use of terminology is important in these types of questions to help distinguish from a reasonable to a thorough response.
- Q.3 (a)** This question was well attempted. The better answers defined ordinal data as being data that can be ranked with the intervals between data not necessarily equal. The weaker answers simply defined ordinal data as ranked data.
- (b)** This question was assessing the AO2 skill and therefore the candidate needed to explain how the psychologist could have gained her sample using self-selected sampling. The better answers referred to the scenario with links such as high school, 15/21/26-year-olds, 10 males and 10 females, students.
- (c)(i)** This question was well attempted and candidates sketching a normal distribution curve gained credit. Candidates lost marks on this if a positive or negative skewed distribution curve was sketched or simply didn't know what a distribution curve was and either left the question blank or drew a different type of graph.

- (c)(ii)** The better responses for this question were able to identify the distribution curve in (a)(i) as a normal distribution. Some candidates were able to sketch the appropriate distribution curve in (a)(i) but were unable to correctly identify this in (a)(ii).
- (c)(iii)** This question was assessing the AO2 skill and reference to the data was needed. The better answers were able to explain why a normal distribution curve represented the data for the participants at age 21 as the mean, median and mode were all at the exact same midpoint as each of them had a happiness score of 3. If participants said the mean, median and mode were the same this would not gain credit as there is no link to the data.
- (d)** This question was well attempted. It was assessing the AO3 skill and therefore no application was required. The better answers were able to give a reasonable evaluation of the strength/weakness of longitudinal research. It is worth noting when evaluating a method as more time consuming a comparison should be given to another methodology to gain credit. The weaker answers gave more of a definition of longitudinal research than evaluation e.g. takes place over a long period of time.
- Q.4 (a)** This answer was well attempted. The better answers were able to justify the use of a scatter diagram to graphically represent the data in the research by it being a relationship between two co-variables sleep and exercise. The question was assessing the AO2 skill, so, reference to the co-variables (exercise and sleep) was needed.
- (b)** This question was asking the candidates to explain one other reason apart from it being a correlational study why a Spearman's rank order correlation co-efficient is appropriate. Candidates lost marks for explaining it was a test of a relationship as this is explaining it is correlational. The better answers were able to identify the level of measurement as ratio data as time has equal units of measurement and a fixed zero. It is worth noting that candidates could gain credit for explaining the data was at least ordinal but explaining the data was ordinal as it was ranked was incorrect.
- (c)** This question was well attempted by all candidates. This question assessed the AO2 skill and where candidates lost marks in this question was a lack of application to the investigation when discussing the ethical and/or the way of dealing with that issue. The better answers were able to explain the relevant ethical issue and link that issue to their investigation and explain an appropriate way of dealing with that ethical issue and link the way of dealing with the issue to their investigation.
- (d)** This question was assessing the AO3 skill and although a link could help develop an answer it wasn't necessary to gain credit. The better answers were able to discuss why an experiment would be advantageous for example, control over the extraneous variables, to test cause and effect etc.

- (e)** There were some good answers presented for this inferential statistics question. The better answers were able to state the observed value was lower than the critical value so the researcher should accept the experimental hypothesis and reject the null with reference to the hypothesis and critical and observed values.
- (f)** This answer was well attempted, and candidates were mostly able to offer at least one weakness of using an experiment in research. The better answers fully elaborated on the weaknesses and used appropriate terminology such as ecological validity, internal validity, demand characteristics etc.

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