



GCE AS EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**PSYCHOLOGY
AS**

SUMMER 2018

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PSYCHOLOGY

GCE AS

Summer 2018

PSYCHOLOGY: FROM PAST TO PRESENT- COMPONENT 1

General Comments

It was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates attempted all questions and appeared to manage time appropriately. There was a definite over reliance on textbook answers taken directly from one textbook in particular. Centres need to show more independence in answers to gain more marks. Summaries of all the classic research studies broken down into the relevant sections are available on the WJEC/EDUQAS website and these along with the original articles should form the basis of teaching on these sections. Centres should also make sure that candidates pay attention to the marks available for each question. In some instances where 2 marks were available candidates wrote long answers that although often gained good marks meant that there was less time to spend on longer questions. Candidates should be reminded to clearly label their answers where there are sub parts to questions, and if using abbreviations within their responses to make sure that they have clearly identified what the abbreviation means when it is first used.

Question 1a

This was attempted by almost all candidates. To obtain 2 marks the candidates needed to identify the methodology- Case studies and for a further mark give some other details of the method used. Most obtained 1 mark by identifying features of the method such as details of the 44 thieves and the control group, or details about interviews etc but many failed to identify that this was a series of case studies. Candidates should also be reminded to consider the marks available when preparing answers. This was a 2 mark question and many wrote half a page of details. For this question a couple of lines of relevant information was sufficient to obtain all marks.

Question 1b

This was a differentiator on the exam paper and few candidates managed to obtain full marks on this question. The best answers followed the actual conclusions drawn by Bowlby. However, most just said that deprivation led to delinquency or thieving and cited findings rather than conclusions. These answers obtained minimal marks and candidates should be reminded that their own conclusions or those offered by other researchers beyond the study publication date are not creditworthy.

Question 2

This was a well answered question with candidates being able to identify ethical considerations of psychosurgery or drug therapy. Better answers made the connection between the therapy and ethical considerations explicit whilst others may have mentioned placebos and side effects without tying this back to the ethics. Likewise some answers gave weaknesses of the approach, and did not make a direct link back to ethical considerations.

Question 3

This was a generally well answered question with candidates able to describe localisation of brain function and identify the role of the four lobes. Better answers made it explicit that these areas are responsible for different areas of behaviour. If candidates are going to use evidence such as the Raine *et al.* study to back up points made they must make this explicit. It is not effective just to write some details of the research without making any link to localisation of brain function. There seemed to be an equal split between those selecting neurotransmitters and evolutionary explanations for the second assumptions with some candidates getting confused over the role of dopamine and serotonin. This also was the case with evolutionary influences with candidates not directly linking their examples (altruism) or their description to the fact that they are adaptive behaviours that are present now as they gave our ancestors an advantage and therefore these traits were passed down through our genes.

Question 4

This question produced a wide variety of responses with better responses identifying weakness and analysing why these were weaknesses and weaker responses just describing the weaknesses. There is an ongoing confusion between reductionism and determinism and although many mentioned schemas in their answers, they were muddled and were unable to explain the link to determinism. There was also confusion around nature and nurture with candidates saying it was all nature and all nurture or indeed neither of these. A few candidates included strengths of the cognitive approach here. Unfortunately, as these did not address the question these did not attract credit.

Question 5

Almost all candidates answered this question. Best answers were accurate and detailed and followed the information outlined in the study. A large number of candidates included findings and although these didn't lose the candidate marks it does mean that they may have struggled with time later in the paper and much of this material could not obtain credit. Several candidates correctly mentioned joint stimulation but then failed to mention what this was and weaker candidates were muddled on sequence and details of the various stages or could identify the correct time periods but gave little detail of what happened at this point.

Question 6

This was the 10 mark AO2 application question on the paper and it was a well answered question with candidates able to identify aspects of the biological and psychodynamic approach that would explain Alex's behaviours. Here most applied the assumptions of the approaches and relied on neurotransmitters, localisation of brain function and evolutionary explanations and the same was true of the psychodynamic assumptions. Although candidates didn't choose to go down this route general knowledge of the approach such as the scientific emphasis for the biological approach and the non-scientific emphasis of the psychodynamic approach would also have been creditworthy.

Question 7a

On this question there appeared to be an equal balance between those choosing CBT and those choosing REBT. Here some candidates said they were discussing CBT however then went on to give the components of REBT or vice versa. This was a generally well answered question with better answers giving very detailed description of the components whilst a few candidates included information on systematic desensitisation which was not creditworthy.

Question 7b

Fewer students attempted the evaluation of the therapy. There were a wide variety of answers and candidates should be reminded that for AO3 questions that are 10 marks or more a conclusion is required. In a small number of cases there was in-depth detail of the effectiveness of the therapy however as no other points were included marks were restricted as the answer had depth but not range. It was pleasing that answers rarely relied on generic evaluation of the approach.

Question 8

Here most answers followed the format of one of the textbooks, although it was pleasing to see that some candidates had included other material such as Seligman's work with the armed forces and how positive psychology has been used in this field. With more and more research being available, this gives candidates the opportunity to use other areas where positive psychology has been applied to incorporate into these questions. Candidates should be reminded that this is a debate question and therefore they should answer why there is a debate in this area. In addition conclusions are required for this question and a small number of participants limited the marks available to them by failing to include either a mini or a main conclusion. Candidates should bear in mind that this answer does need to include information about psychological research/theory and generic personal opinions are not sufficient to attract many marks.

PSYCHOLOGY

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COMPONENT 2: PSYCHOLOGY – INVESTIGATING BEHAVIOUR

General Comments

Although there were some really good performances by candidates, the examining team were slightly disappointed with the low standard achieved by a minority of candidates. Although most candidates were able to attempt most questions, generally the answers demonstrated a lack of knowledge, with some candidates making basic errors such as mistaking ethical for validity issues.

Candidates are getting better at applying their knowledge, although it must be noted that only answers which are applied AND contain knowledge appropriate to the set question receive marks. It became evident that some centres had not covered the entire AS specification or that some candidates had opted to selectively revise topics. Consequently, with either of these strategies employed, candidates' performance was impaired.

Section A

Question 1

Most candidates were able to attempt this question, although the majority were unable to offer a thorough explanation of a difference between research conducted in the field and research conducted online, some candidates limited their marks by just offering definitions of the two locations of research.

Question 2

Most candidates were able to gain some marks from this question. Although descriptions of ethical guidelines tended to be more protracted, they weren't necessarily better than the descriptions of ethics committees. When considering guidelines, many candidates took it upon themselves to just describe ethical issues, a strategy which received no credit unless linked in some way to a specific ethical guideline or how the guidelines might suggest that issue should be dealt with. Descriptions of ethics committees frequently included erroneous details, such as 'the BPS checks every piece of psychological research' or that an ethics committee can 'banish psychologists'. A minority of candidates confused 'ethics committees' with 'peer review'. Some candidates tried to add detail to their answers by giving evaluative points about the ethical guidelines and ethics committees. Unfortunately, this strategy did not benefit them as credit was only given to AO1 content.

Question 3

Many candidates were able to accurately identify the symbols, however some inevitably did get them the wrong way around and so received no credit.

Question 4

Few candidates were able to identify both of the appropriate levels of measurement accurately. Many candidates answered one correctly, but then identified an inappropriate level of measurement for the other. A minority seemed to have no idea about these concepts and just wrote various methodological terms, obviously gaining no credit.

Question 5

- (a) Many candidates were able to accurately identify 'A' as the appropriate pie chart, however many incorrectly identified 'C'.
- (b) Most candidates were able to gain some credit and many were even able to give an accurate and detailed description (5 marks). Those with 2/3 tended to omit details regarding the sample's educational or occupational background. Only a minority of candidates included information not cited in the original article or included irrelevant procedural information.

Question 6

The examining team were really surprised by how little appropriate discussion some candidates included in their responses to this question. Although the question was worth 10 marks and was quite an open question about validity, many candidates offered answers which were just vague evaluations of Milgram. On the whole the answers were poorly structured in terms of paragraphs and inappropriate or non-existent conclusions. Some candidates made a reasonable attempt to use evidence to back up their discussion of the fact that Milgram's task was 'unrealistic', but these answers tended to lack range in terms of the issues they covered. Many candidates described procedural details, such as the Experimenter offering verbal prods, as an issue of validity without really considering the nature of the behaviour (obedience) being observed or considerations of the situation that Milgram was aiming to test. Better answers were solely focused on validity, included a range of internal and external issues and offered conclusions that didn't just summarise what they had already written.

Section B

Question 7

- (a) Some candidates had a good knowledge of the features of participant observations and non-participant observations and applied this knowledge well to the scenario. A sizeable minority confused participant/non-participant with covert/overt. Another issue that impaired marks was that some candidates' marks were impaired by the fact that they only really focused on the explanation of why it was a participant observation and ignored why it wasn't a non-participant observation.
- (b) Sadly, this question was answered poorly by most candidates. Very few were able to give an explanation as to how inter-rater reliability can be applied in this scenario. Those who did achieve any credit for this question tended to offer minimal explanations, with little/no application to the scenario.

- (c) It was surprising how many candidates discussed 'working with vulnerable individuals (including children)' as one of their ethical issues, even though the question specified they were to explain two *other* possible ethical issues. As a result, many candidates automatically lost 4 of the eight marks available for this question. Confidentiality and risk to participant's status were popular issues that were linked well. Valid consent was accepted as an issue as long as the candidate related it to the children not knowing they were being observed by the social psychologist, and not that they were unable to give consent because they were children. Most candidates were able to offer some advice that would deal with the ethical issue, but these were not always applied to the scenario.
- (d) Very few candidates were able to offer an appropriate explanation as to why a bar chart is appropriate for the results from this research. Some tried to answer with generic answers, such as 'a bar chart is a good way to display data', but these received no credit as this sort of response is too generic and could be applied to all graphs.
- (e) This question stated 'issues of validity' and hence required the candidate to consider at least two validity issues. Most were able to identify issues of validity and apply them well, however fewer offered a more thorough discussion. A wide variety of validity issues included whether the canteen staff usually gave instructions and confounding variables such as some children just having better manners than others.

Question 8

- (a) Most candidates were able to describe one relevant ethical issue and apply it well to the research. Popular ethical issues included, protection of participants (physical and psychological) and the lack of the right to withdraw as the sample were volunteers.
- (b) There were clear differences in the styles of directional hypotheses offered by candidates from different centres. These, as long as they are appropriate, were accommodated in the mark scheme. Most candidates sadly did not fully operationalise the hypothesis, with many just citing 'happiness' instead of 'happiness percentage', and hence lost a mark. A surprising minority of candidates wrote a non-directional hypothesis and so received no credit.
- (c) As the scenario alluded to the sample arguably being an opportunity (local coffee shop) OR self-selected sample (advertised for volunteers), strengths and weaknesses of both received credit. Learners should be deterred from advocating that 'quick and easy' is a sufficient strength for opportunity sampling; as ever this receives no credit unless there is also comparison to another method i.e. 'quicker and easier to select than a stratified sample'. A sizeable minority of candidates still believe that a strength of a self-selected sample is that you will achieve a variety of possible participants; this is particularly frustrating as they then go on to state a weakness is that people who volunteer are likely to come from a narrow range of people, and hence the sample won't be representative. Again, most candidates were able to apply their knowledge of a strength to the scenario, but again a minority explained a weakness, but did not apply it, meaning they lost one of the four marks available on this question.
- (d) Candidates did not receive credit for identifying the experimental design in this question, however many candidates felt obliged to note it. Some candidates tended to just identify a strength, 'there is less chance of demand characteristics' without offering any further explanation. Weaknesses were less evident in the answers of many candidates, and again many included no link to the scenario.

- (e)
 - (i) Many candidates were able to answer this question correctly, although 'correlation' was also an answer offered by a minority.
 - (ii) This question was answered poorly by most candidates, again offering a generic response about how it was a 'good way to display data'. A few candidates alluded to it being a good way to show changes over time or talked about continuous data and hence they received credit, if it was linked.
 - (iii) Basic interpretations were offered by some candidates, and a few offered 'inferential' interpretations. Most candidates were able to give a reasonably good description of the results, both between the two conditions and over the 5 days.
- (f) Few candidates were able to offer more than one appropriate reason for using a Mann-Whitney U Test. Most candidates had problems in identifying/explaining the level of measurement evident in the happiness percentages.
- (g) Again some candidates ignored the instructions in the question 'apart from sampling and experimental design' and offered criticisms of the sample/sampling and experimental design; these weaknesses received no credit. Many candidates were able to offer one weakness and offer advice as to how to improve, but fewer were able to offer a thorough discussion of two weaknesses and give advice as to how both of these could be improved.

Advice

Go over the 'maths content' of the specification; don't expect candidates to do well when they only have GCSE Mathematics knowledge to rely on, especially in relation to why certain graphical representations are used.

Pay close attention to the command words in the question e.g. 'Explain' requires more detail than 'Identify'.

When explaining inferential tests, it is perfectly acceptable to state the level of measurement is AT LEAST an ordinal level of measurement, for tests which can be used with ordinal, interval or ratio data.

When asked questions which expect you to explain issues **and** explain how to deal with them, perhaps think about how to deal with the issue BEFORE choosing and writing about the issue.

As ever, link, link, link in any scenario question. If asked about a strength and a weakness BOTH need to be linked to the scenario to get full credit.



WJEC
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX
Tel No 029 2026 5000
Fax 029 2057 5994
E-mail: exams@wjec.co.uk
website: www.wjec.co.uk