



A-level

# Psychology

7182/3 Issues and options in psychology

Report on the Examination

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## General

As last year, this paper seemed to discriminate rather well. At the top of the range, it was pleasing to see many excellent scripts. Most students appeared able to pace themselves throughout the examination and there were few missed questions. Now we are in the eighth year of this specification, some of the issues that students grappled with a couple of years ago appear to be less problematic. Most coped very well with the Research Methods content on this paper. There was evidence of very high-level discussion in the extended response questions. Students are well-versed in the requirement to use evidence effectively. Similarly, application skills have improved; lots of students are using all aspects of the stem to impressive effect. Of course, not all were able to access the higher marks. It was noteworthy this year that many of the 8-marks questions produced disappointing answers, particularly in Relationships and Gender. The question on referencing, albeit worth only 3 marks, also proved challenging for many. Schizophrenia remains the most popular option topic on this paper and Eating Behaviour the least popular. As in recent series, there were issues with illegible handwriting. Centres are advised to explore the alternatives that are available if their students have a difficulty in this area.

## Section A

### Issues and Debates

For questions 01 and 02, most students were able to correctly identify ‘Carlo’ in the first instance, and ‘Dalia’ in the second, though there was a considerable number who got these the wrong way round. Some students ‘hedged their bets’ by writing the same name for both of their answers. Of the wrongly selected names, ‘Emma’ was by some distance the most popular, and usually for Question 02. In Question 03, many students were able to provide a clear and coherent definition of ‘ethnocentrism’, and often one that very closely mirrored the suggested content in the mark scheme. Those who fell short often gave a definition of ‘culture bias’, which failed to include appropriate reference to the notion of cultural superiority. Some offered examples of ethnocentric research, but again, the nub of the answer – the implied cultural superiority – was absent. Despite dropping marks in Question 03, many students were still able to access all four marks for Question 04. Again, many interpreted ethnocentrism within the context of ethnocentric/culturally biased research. Thus, the most popular answer was the methodological problem of being unable to generalise findings any further than the culture studied. Many students gave very sophisticated answers centred around the dangers of stereotyping or discriminating against entire cultural or ethnic groups. There were some very good examples to support these arguments, such as the (mis)use of culturally biased IQ tests to support discriminatory practices. Question 05 was the first of three applied 16-marks extended response questions on the paper, and many students fared well. There was sound knowledge of the different forms of determinism, and there was often effective application to most aspects of the stem. Similarly, there was evidence of good discussion: Libet’s research was typically used effectively to support hard/biological determinism. The argument that deterministic ideas are at odds with the legal system’s notion of moral responsibility was also well-made. Of those students who struggled, many presented their essay as a straightforward debate between free will and determinism which missed the point of the question somewhat. Lots of students tried to reframe the stem as illustrating soft determinism, often unsuccessfully. There was also frequent confusion with other debates, such as nature-nurture and holism-reductionism.

## Section B

### Relationships

For Question 06, most students were able to access at least two marks by stating that all the names/numbers of the people in the study would be subject to some sort of lottery method. The third mark, for explaining how those names/numbers would be allocated to Group 1 or Group 2 proved more elusive for some. Generally, though, this was a very well-answered question. In Question 07, some students simply restated the figures in the table, and failed to score any marks as a result. Others were able to claim the justification mark, but their conclusion lacked the required clarity for the second mark. For Question 08, most students were able to identify either the ‘method’, ‘design; or ‘procedure’ as creditworthy alternatives and as such were awarded a mark. There were no marks given for ‘methodology’, although this was a popular answer. Other common incorrect answers were the ‘abstract’ and the ‘introduction’. The key watchword in Question 09 was ‘specific’. For this reason, answers that simply read, ‘disclosing personal information’ were judged to be too vague for credit. That said, this question posed most students little difficulty and there was a wide variety of correct answers. Question 10 was surprisingly poorly answered. Many students described the matching hypothesis not in terms of physical attractiveness, but as a host of other potentially matched traits, such as wealth or hobbies and interests. Many wrongly interpreted the Walster dance study as supporting the predictions of the theory, and there were some vague real-life examples masquerading as evidence, such as the use of dating apps. There were very few answers in the top level. So too with Question 11. There were some muddled accounts of anisogamy, with intersexual and intra-sexual selection often presented the wrong way round. Many answers were let down by descriptions of evolutionary mating strategies as some kind of conscious choice, rather than being part of our genetic make-up. Discussion was mostly made up of research studies, with Clark and Hatfield, and Buss, the most cited.

### Gender

For Question 12, most students were able to access at least two marks by stating that all the names/numbers of the people in the study would be subject to some sort of lottery method. The third mark, for explaining how those names/numbers would be allocated to Group 1 or Group 2 proved more elusive for some. Generally, though, this was a very well-answered question. In Question 13, some students simply restated the figures in the table, and failed to score any marks as a result. Others were able to claim the justification mark, but their conclusion lacked the required clarity for the second mark. For Question 14, most students were able to identify either the ‘method’, ‘design; or ‘procedure’ as creditworthy alternatives and as such were awarded a mark. There were no marks given for ‘methodology’, although this was a popular answer. Other common incorrect answers were the ‘abstract’ and the ‘introduction’. Question 15 caused few problems, particularly because students could either give examples of sex-stereotyped behaviours, or more general behavioural traits. Those who did lose marks gave examples that would not necessarily be associated with one sex or the other, such as keeping fit. Question 16 wrongfooted many students who seemed underprepared for a question of this type. There were some good answers though, mainly from those who discussed the psychodynamic and social learning theory versions of identification, resulting in effective analyses of both. Question 17 was one of the better answered 8-marks questions on the paper. Many students gave convincing accounts of Bem’s methodology and were able to assess the sex role inventory in terms of its reliability and validity.

## Cognition and development

For Question 18, most students were able to access at least two marks by stating that all the names/numbers of the people in the study would be subject to some sort of lottery method. The third mark, for explaining how those names/numbers would be allocated to Group 1 or Group 2 proved more elusive for some. Generally, though, this was a very well-answered question. In Question 19, some students simply restated the figures in the table, and failed to score any marks as a result. Others were able to claim the justification mark, but their conclusion lacked the required clarity for the second mark. For Question 20, most students were able to identify either the ‘method’, ‘design; or ‘procedure’ as creditworthy alternatives and as such were awarded a mark. There were no marks given for ‘methodology’, although this was a popular answer. Other common incorrect answers were the ‘abstract’ and the ‘introduction’. In Question 21, most students were able to provide two examples of conservation tasks, mostly based on the work of Piaget. There were some bizarre answers though; perhaps some students assumed they were not able to draw on Piaget’s original conservation tasks and felt compelled to invent their own, with varying degrees of success. Question 22 produced some good answers. Many students were able to describe mirror neurons and their role in social cognition. There was frequent reference to the links with ASD as well as effective use of evidence, of which the work of Rizzolatti was the most oft cited. Question 23 also gave rise to coherent responses, although these tended to be overly descriptive so that students penalised themselves in terms of time. There was very good technical detail of Vygotsky’s theory, alongside effective use of terminology, and when students did evaluate, there was decent analysis of the applications of Vygostkian concepts to education. Many students tried to compare Vygotsky’s theory to Piaget’s, but this was less impressive, as Piaget’s theory was often simply described rather than used as effective comparison.

## Section C

### Schizophrenia

There were very few students indeed who did not know that Question 24 was describing meta-analysis. However, there were far fewer who correctly identified option A for Question 25, and those who got it wrong invariably selected option B as their answer. For Question 26, the majority talked about the possible side-effects associated with drug treatment and many went on to point out that these may lead to discontinuation of use as part of their elaboration. Most students found it relatively straightforward to identify a positive and negative symptom of schizophrenia as part of their answer to Question 27. Popular choices were hallucinations and avolition, respectively. It was also the case that most students could provide a clear and coherent explanation of the difference, though some lost a mark due to the brevity of the response, often offering little more than the words ‘added’ and ‘taken away’. There were some very good answers to the extended response question on the family dysfunction explanation for schizophrenia (Question 28). Most students adopted a breadth over depth approach and talked about all three explanations on the mark scheme. However, this occasionally meant that each was reduced to little more than a couple of sentences which may have restricted access to the top level. It did mean though that students were able to deal with most aspects of the stem. Some very detailed discussions dealt with the ethical implications of blaming the family, practical application to family therapy and the problem of establishing causation.

## **Eating behaviour**

There were very few students indeed who did not know that Question 29 was describing meta-analysis. Almost as many were able to correctly identify the true statement as option B for Question 30. A number of students found Question 31 difficult. They often simply listed alternative explanations for eating disorders without any meaningful comparison with the neural explanation. Those who talked about ‘reductionism’ were usually the most successful. Question 32 proved not to be straightforward. Some students got their definitions of neophobia and taste aversion the wrong way round, and there was a general tendency to offer up a partial repeat of the definition as the example. This was especially true of neophobia. As with the corresponding Schizophrenia question, there were some very good top-level answers for Question 33. Those who knew the key elements of family systems theory were able to describe these succinctly, and then match their description to the appropriate part of the stem. It was striking how well evidence was used in this essay; students who had been taught this topic seemed to have lots of studies at their disposal.

## **Stress**

There were very few students indeed who did not know that Question 34 was describing meta-analysis. Although Question 35 proved slightly more problematic, there were still lots of correct answers. Students approached Question 36 in a similar way to the corresponding Schizophrenia question, and so marks were often awarded for reference to side-effects, plus some elaboration. For this section, students were more likely to talk about the issue of drugs ‘masking’ the problem and not tackling the true source of stress. In Question 37, students were typically much more effective when outlining and giving examples of instrumental support than emotional support. For the latter, definitions and examples too often overlapped and were somewhat repetitive. Answers for the extended response question (Q38) were probably the weakest of the three in Section C, although there were some very good responses, nevertheless. Most students went down the route of describing research evidence, and picked up knowledge marks that way, rather than describing the biological links between stress and illness. Some of the evidence presented was muddled, with an amalgam of two or three different studies at once. This also meant that students were less able to successfully apply their knowledge to the example of Kiera in the question. In terms of discussion, many students recognised the problem of mediating variables, usually diet and/or personality, when trying to assess the impact of stress on illness.

## **Section D**

### **Aggression**

Question 39 produced a wide variety of answers and discriminated well between those students who had clearly come across the structure of a reference before, and those who were left to guess. Many students knew that the date of publication was missing but far fewer were able to identify other details, such as the name and location of the publisher. Question 40 also proved challenging for many students. There was widespread misunderstanding of the key requirement of the question; namely, to modify the response options on the questionnaire, rather than create a completely new ‘open’ question – which was the suggestion that many students gave. A high number of students said there should be a numbered scale between the two extreme options of ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ but did not elaborate further. Answers of this type were awarded one mark. For Question 41, a high percentage of answers was awarded two marks. Most students knew that an innate releasing mechanism produces a fixed action pattern in response to an environmental stimulus, but far fewer talked about the neural system that underpins this

process. There were some well-crafted answers for Question 42. All three explanations on the mark scheme were seen, and sometimes within the same answer. Some students had to rely on alternatives which only met the threshold of social-psychological if there was some justification as part of the answer, such as the importation model. Many students produced accounts of social learning theory that were not distinct from operant conditioning – though in the context of the question, these gained some credit. Those students who discussed deindividuation generally did so adroitly, producing lots of relevant knowledge and discussion. The frustration-aggression hypothesis was done less impressively on the whole, and applied links to the stem were sometimes somewhat speculative.

### **Forensic psychology**

Question 43 produced a wide variety of answers and discriminated well between those students who had clearly come across the structure of a reference before, and those who were left to guess. Many students knew that the date of publication was missing but far fewer were able to identify other details, such as the name and location of the publisher. Question 44 also proved challenging for many students. There was widespread misunderstanding of the key requirement of the question; namely, to modify the response options on the questionnaire, rather than create a completely new ‘open’ question – which was the suggestion that many students gave. A high number of students said there should be a numbered scale between the two extreme options of ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ but did not elaborate further. For Question 45, most students could state the three elements of the criminal personality – or two elements for those students who drew on Eysenck’s original work. There was also frequent creditworthy reference to the biological basis of personality. Although not a requirement of the question, if there was sufficient other information present, a surprising number of students did not make it clear why someone who scored highly on all three traits would be more likely to offend. Again, for Question 46, a breadth rather than depth approach proved most popular as many students sought to describe three ways of dealing with offending to broaden the scope for application. Even with those who did not pursue this route, behaviour modification/token economy was by far the most chosen option, followed by anger management. Those who discussed custodial sentencing produced the least convincing accounts, and often seemed unsure of which material to include. Restorative justice was also included in some essays, and was reasonably well-described and discussed, although in terms of application, students quickly ‘ran out of road’ as there were no obvious links in the stem.

### **Addiction**

Question 47 produced a wide variety of answers and discriminated well between those students who had clearly come across the structure of a reference before, and those who were left to guess. Many students knew that the date of publication was missing but far fewer were able to identify other details, such as the name and location of the publisher. Question 48 also proved challenging for many students. There was widespread misunderstanding of the key requirement of the question; namely, to modify the response options on the questionnaire, rather than create a completely new ‘open’ question – which was the suggestion that many students gave. A high number of students said there should be a numbered scale between the two extreme options of ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ but did not elaborate further. There were some good answers to Question 49. The most economical path to three marks was some reference to the cyclical nature of Prochaska’s model, a list of the six stages and the notion that relapse is an integral part. Some students perhaps penalised themselves in terms of time by producing lengthy descriptions of each stage. Overall, the standard of responses for Question 50 was rather broad. There were some very good and clear accounts of aversion therapy and/or covert sensitisation which included explicit links to behaviourist principles as well as to the stem. Others provided impressive knowledge of cognitive behaviour therapy and how this could be used to tackle Asa’s evident ‘skill bias’. Other answers

were much less convincing, however. Attempted discussion was often vague, involving efficacy studies which appeared to have been made up on the spot, and some fairly speculative remarks related to time and cost of different treatment methods.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.