



GCSE

Psychology

8182/2 Social Context and Behaviour Paper 2

Report on the examination

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Summary

Overall performance

The purpose of this report is to highlight any areas of good practice and any areas for improvement stemming from students' answers in Paper 2 in 2025. Where appropriate, it will also offer guidance for teachers and students as to how future performances might be improved.

This was the 7th series of examinations for the current specification - the 5th sat by all of the students entered for the qualification.

As part of this specification, students are 'expected to draw on knowledge and understanding of the entire course of study'. There will be one 9-mark synoptic question in each paper for every examination cycle of this specification. In 2025, the synoptic question in paper 2 was question 19 and it asked students to draw on knowledge from two different paper 2 topics (Brain and neuropsychology and Psychological problems). The discussion part of this question was an area where students performed less well.

Students are required to show understanding of research methods, practical research skills and mathematical skills through-out all of the topic areas in both papers. Although there were some questions where many students did well, there were also some clear areas of weakness. It is highly recommended that centres provide as many opportunities as possible for students to develop their research methods skills. This may be done by including these skills at appropriate places within other topic areas, and by carrying out actual practical work. It is also recommended that centres are aware of the specification content contained in Appendix A: mathematical requirements, as this is not exactly the same as the Data Handling content listed as part of the Research Methods topic.

Because scripts are marked online, there are some specific concerns about the ways students use the answer booklets and additional sheets, which centres need to be aware of so that they can advise their students accordingly:

- Most students are now using the additional sheets provided at the back of the booklet to continue answers that do not fit within the allocated area. Where the additional sheets are used to finish an answer, it is helpful if students indicate that they have done this.
- Students should be encouraged to clearly and accurately identify which question they are answering on the additional sheets. Where there are several questions with similar numbers, it is important that students identify the correct one - for example, writing '2.2' rather than just '2'
- Students should be encouraged to write in black ink because lighter colours do not scan well and make it harder for examiners to read students' work.
- Students should be encouraged to use sensibly sized writing as the scanning of tiny handwriting results in answers that are very challenging to read. They should also be encouraged to write as legibly as possible.

Comments relating to students' performance on specific questions are provided below. It is hoped that these comments will be helpful in guiding the teaching of the specification and the preparation of students for future exams.

Areas where students performed well

Multiple choice questions:

These were generally answered well with over 90% of students gaining the available marks in questions 6.1 and 11.1, and 75% gaining the mark for question 1. 95% of students were awarded at least one mark for question 15.1.

It was especially pleasing to see that students were, in the main, indicating their choice of response in the appropriate mark box, and correctly amending their choices when necessary. However, some students are indicating more than the required number of answers and this has an effect on the mark that can be awarded.

Maths questions:

At least 10% of the overall assessment of 8182 is through the use of mathematical skills. These marks make a big difference to the students' final grade. Although these questions were generally answered well, this was not always the case. Questions 11.1 and 11.2 were both answered correctly in over 90% of papers.

However, for question 11.3 (in which students were asked to calculate the mean) only 60% received full marks. This is relatively low for this type of question. Question 6.2 required students to calculate the range and it was unusual to see 2% more students giving a completely incorrect answer than getting full marks. With both of these questions, the errors were mainly around the numbers chosen for the calculations, rather than the knowledge of 'mean' and 'range'. Interpretation of quantitative data is part of the Data handling section of the specification and a key part of successfully answering these types of maths questions. It is important that opportunities to practice interpreting frequency tables, diagrams, bar charts, histograms and scatter diagrams are given through-out the course.

AO1 knowledge:

This was particularly seen when describing studies (Q10, Q17.1) and in the knowledge of the basic function of the lobes of the brain (Q13). However, there is a strong tendency to rely on AO1 knowledge even when the command term requires another approach (such as in the discussion part of Q19).

Areas where students performed less well

Research methods:

Although understanding of the research method topics has shown some improvement over the life of this specification, it was concerning to see that less than 45% of students were able to correctly identify the experimental design being used in the described study (Q11.4). A common incorrect answer was 'laboratory study', suggesting many students understood the

requirement of the question as naming the research method rather than the experimental design.

It was very pleasing to see more understanding of null hypotheses (Q2.1) than in previous papers. However, this is still quite low with only ¼ of answers receiving any marks.

In both of the questions that asked for a hypothesis (Q2.1 and Q14), a key issue was not giving a dependent variable that was operationalised. In Q2.1, the majority of answers simply referred to 'the level of conformity' rather than to the lack of difference in the answers given by participants. In Q14, the dependent variable was often referred to as doing a task 'better'. It is important the students are aware of the need for the DV to be measurable.

Understanding of research methods and practical research skills is a fundamental element of psychology. This is reflected in the composition of the papers for 8182 with at least 20% of the overall marks being awarded for skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to research methods. The specification states that 'These skills should be developed by studying the specification content and through ethical, practical research activities. It is important therefore that the research methods topic is not just learnt as a stand-alone topic but is instead integrated into each of the other topic areas as well.

Exam technique:

There were also a number of areas in which students did not perform as well because of their exam technique. These included issues around the misreading of questions, not addressing the command term, not answering the actual question, not addressing all aspects of the question and an over-reliance on the stimulus material. These errors resulted in students, who often seem to have relevant knowledge, receiving few or no marks for questions they may otherwise have achieved a much higher mark for.

Social Influence

Questions where students performed well

Question 2.2:

This question was answered well with almost 90% of students receiving at least one mark. Over 40% of answers gave a clear conclusion and explained it with specific reference to both conditions. Where full marks were not awarded, it was generally because only one condition was referred to in the explanation, meaning that it lacked clarity.

Question 2.3:

40% of students got full credit for this question, and 80% received at least one mark. It was not uncommon for students to write in much more detail than was needed for a 3-mark answer. Generic answers that were more of an evaluation of laboratory studies were a common reason for answers not receiving full marks.

Question 3:

70% of answers received at least two of the available four marks. These marks generally came from a limited definition that addressed making less effort when working with others, as well

as a limited reference mark. Very few answers also included ‘as opposed to working alone’ in the definition. References to Anna and Mari’s comments were often lifted straight from the stem with no attempt to link these to the definition.

Questions where students performed less well

Question 4.1:

Although two-thirds of students received at least one mark, only one-third received both marks. Most students appeared to have good knowledge of factors affecting bystander intervention, however many of the factors that were identified were not relevant to the stem (many wrote about expertise or presence of others). This lack of relevance to the stem was also seen with some explanations (e.g. cost of helping - might not help because it would make them late for work). A common incorrect response was saying some form of medical ‘expertise’ was needed in order to help the actor with the scar.

Question 4.2:

Although over 90% of answers received at least one mark, less than 10% received all four marks. Many responses suggested strengths of field experiments such as ‘lack of demand characteristics’, ‘high ecological validity’ and ‘natural behaviour shown’. Responses were less successful in linking these ideas to the Piliavin study with many just saying it took place in the subway.

Question 5:

This 6-mark question on Milgram saw almost 70% receive at least two marks. However, less than 10% of students achieved full marks. The majority of those answers receiving lower marks, did not go beyond writing about participant A following orders because the person giving the order is an authority figure / in a uniform.

Common misunderstandings

Q 4.2 - Field experiments are not cheaper.

A common incorrect strength that was given in question 4.2 was that field experiments are cheaper. However, this is generally not the case because they often involve higher costs due to the complexity of carrying out research in a real-world setting.

Language, thought and communication

Questions where students performed well

Question 9:

This 3-mark ‘design a study’ scenario question saw 50% of students achieve at least two marks. The most effective responses had a procedure with two conditions where a confederate either did or didn’t use postural echo during a conversation. The conversation might be ‘set up’ as an interview or an attempt to sell a product, with the data collected being about the success of the

‘sales pitch’ or a rating of the friendliness of the interviewer. One common reason for lost marks was that the described task was not described in sufficient detail. For it to be considered to be ‘clear and accurate’, there needs to be enough detail for the reader to know what they would need to do in order to replicate it. In a lot of answers there seemed to be confusion about what postural echo actually is and students just wrote about open/closed posture without any reference made to copying these postures.

Question 10:

This 9-mark question used a 4/5 AO split and asked for a description and evaluation of Yuki’s study of emoticons. Many students demonstrated a good level of both AO1 and AO3 skills and over ¼ of answers were judged as fitting the descriptors for the detailed markband. Almost 5% received the top mark of a nine. Where less credit was awarded for the description, it was often because the response lacked reference to the rating scale or details of the emoticons. Reasons for evaluations not receiving full marks included them being generic (such as writing about laboratory studies having high levels of control without any real link to Yuki) or a lack of depth to answers (such as stating that emoticons are not the same as a real face but then not explaining any potential effect of this).

Questions where students performed less well

Question 7.1:

This four mark definition question saw 70% of students receive at least one mark, however less than 10% received all four available marks. A large number of answers were describing research into neonates, rather than writing about what a neonate actually is. More students knew what ‘the sensory deprived’ means and frequently gave a relevant example. However, many students did not explain what ‘deprived’ means in the context of the term, and this reduced the clarity of the answer.

Question 7.2:

Less than 50% of answers were not given any marks for this answer despite students appearing to know something about case studies. Many students were not answering the actual question but were instead describing a case study without any relevant reference to why it would be a suitable method.

Question 8:

Although more than 40% received at least two marks for answers to this question, only 10% gave an answer that received full marks. Many attempts showed some knowledge of ‘survival of the fittest’ and ‘adaptation’ but were not able to make appropriate connections to Darwin’s theory of non-verbal communication. The strongest answers outlined serviceable associated habits and the role of the nervous system in some non-verbal behaviours.

Common misunderstandings

Q9 - The use of words does not automatically mean that data is qualitative.

When the data being collected is in word form but the intention is to count the number of each answer, then it is not qualitative. Examples would include when questions only have a very limited number of answers, e.g. asking ‘did you think the person you were talking to was

friendly?’ (i.e. answers = yes/no), or having a number of different postures made by participants identified by name, but with the intention that the number of answers for each one are then counted. These are the types of answers that are likely to be recorded on a tally sheet - which may be a way of helping students to understand when they are quantitative despite involving a word.

Brain and neuropsychology

Questions where students performed well

Question 13:

This 6-mark question on the lobes of the brain saw almost 55% of students give answers that fitted the descriptors for the top two markbands. However, less than 20% were given a mark of five or six. This was often due to answers not addressing all aspects of the question. The markband descriptors for the detailed level required knowledge of **all** four structures **and all** four functions. This is an example of where exam technique frequently affected the marks awarded. Where there was information missing from answers, it tended to be about the structure rather than the function.

Questions where students performed less well

Question 11.5:

Although almost 60% of answers were awarded at least one mark, many answers did not go beyond outlining the differences between CT and PET scans. Only 15% of answers received the full three marks. The difference between marks was often about how well the command term was met and how relevant the answer was to the results, rather than being about the level of knowledge of the scans.

Question 12.1:

Less than 5% of answers gained all four marks. Although parts A and B were often identified correctly, there were very few correct completions of the diagram with both ‘branches of dendrites’ and ‘synaptic knobs’. The latter were especially uncommon.

Question 14:

This 6-mark ‘design a study’ scenario question was the least attempted question on the paper. Less than 3% of answers received full marks, however over 60% of students received at least two marks. One common error here was describing an experiment that involved repeating a simple task over a short period, usually a memory task. Stronger answers focused on participants learning a new skill, such as playing a guitar or golf, or juggling. Another common error was not providing a hypothesis. When a hypothesis was provided, it was frequently not able to be measured (and therefore not operational), but instead referred to participants being ‘better’ at the new skill. Identification of a sampling method and a brief outline of how to do it were the most successfully completed part of many Q14 answers.

Common misunderstandings

Q14 - Learning and memorization are distinct processes.

Hebb's theory is about how learning affects neuronal growth. Learning is not about memorising something – especially information we already know (such as words on a list). Memorisation focuses on the rehearsal and recall of information, while learning involves understanding it and using it in relevant situations. Although, memorisation is often a part of learning, true learning goes beyond simple recall.

Psychological problems

Questions where students performed well

Question 17.1:

Most students knew the study, often in detail. Almost 70% of answers were awarded at least one mark and 25% of answers received all three marks. Knowing how much information to give and which key pieces were needed for a brief but clear description, were two of the areas where some students seemed less sure. Not giving the correct results was a key reason for many answers not being considered to be clear and detailed (see 'common misunderstandings' section below for further details).

Question 17.2:

Although almost 90% of students received at least one mark for their answers to this question, many answers were either not accurate or not clear enough to get the full four marks. One common reason for this was the lack of elaboration (for example, just stating that 'they are quick and easy'). Another common issue was confusing demand characteristics with and social desirability. (See the 'common misunderstandings' section below for a further reason for marks being lost).

Questions where students performed less well

Question 16:

This question could be answered by simply identifying the three examples of social effects listed in the specification. It is somewhat surprising therefore that only 40% of students gained any marks for this question, and less than 20% received full marks. The most common reason for this result was students writing about individual effects and/or characteristics of depression/anxiety instead. It is possible that students incorrectly interpreted 'social' as being about relationship and socialising problems.

Question 18:

Although this question was evaluating a named intervention/therapy, only 50% of students were awarded any marks at all and only 15% received three marks. Some answers described aversion therapy rather than evaluating it. Another common reason for marks not being awarded was an inaccurate understanding of the ethical issues of this method. Such answers argued it was not ethical due to the harmful nature of the therapy. Given that aversion therapy

is generally used when the harm from the addictive behaviour is far greater and when informed consent has been given by the addict, this is not an accurate evaluative point. If arguments around ethics are going to be made when evaluating aversion therapy, they need to be about informed consent. Creditworthy evaluative points would be ones addressing the level of information provided and if consent is entirely voluntary or if the patient/client may have been coerced in some way.

Question 19:

This year's synoptic question was the second least attempted question and only 1/3 of answers received a mark of four or higher. There may be a number of factors for this outcome, including this question not asking about a named study, it not including an AO2 element (as was the case with the synoptic question last year), and it being the last question in the paper. Although a lot of students knew some relevant terminology, there was limited understanding about the actual process of synaptic transmission. Students often seem less prepared to address longer questions that go beyond a 'describe and evaluate' style. It was common in answers to this question to see the discussion of whether or not neurotransmitters can be considered to be involved in causing depression, answered by describing and evaluating the use of antidepressants.

Common misunderstandings

Q17.1 - Being an identical twin doesn't make you more likely to become an alcoholic.

It was common to see statements of results that didn't express the idea of concordance rates correctly, for example, '54% of MZ twins abuse alcohol while 28% of DZ twins do' rather than '54% of identical twins had the same level of alcohol use but only 28% of non-identical twins were in the same category'. This is an example of where a more precise use of words is necessary because the difference here in the meaning is significant.

Q17.2 - Not all questionnaires are the same.

A lot of answers appeared to be giving a strength or a weakness of a particular type of question or a particular mode of delivery. This can be appropriate if the answer also includes some reference to the type of question/mode (for example 'When questionnaires use closed questions, the answers can be analysed and compared relatively easily' - MS). However, this was often not the case with answers to Q17.2. It is important that students are aware that questionnaires can include a variety of questions (closed, open or a combination of both) and they can have many different possible modes of delivery, (such as online, mail, or telephone questionnaires).

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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