



A Level **Psychology**

7182/3

Report on the examination

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General

Students found this paper rather more challenging than last year, although there were some examples of very good scripts. As is typical of recent series, most students appeared able to pace themselves throughout the examination and there were few missed questions. However, there were several extended response questions that students found difficult, most notably in the Forensic, Gender and Schizophrenia sections. Many also struggled with the Research Methods content, which this year appeared exclusively on Section A. The best answers were reserved for short-answer application questions, particularly those in the Relationships and Cognitive Development sections. Students also performed well in the higher tariff questions in the Relationships, Addiction and Eating Behaviour sections. Better informed students were able to present some very good discussion points which were fully elaborated and often included effective use of evidence. There was also impressive use of application skills in many questions. As was noted last year, students appear to be more mindful of using the whole of the stem in their answer than in earlier series. That said, there were lots of very low scoring scripts this time, as many students found it difficult to progress beyond the lower levels of the mark scheme for the various 8-mark and 16-mark questions.

Section A: Issues and Debates

The most selected types of determinism in 01 were biological and environmental. The majority of students had little difficulty conveying their understanding of biological determinism and were able to make an effective link to the stem – usually through some reference to biological disposition or genetic inheritance. Students were also able to demonstrate knowledge of environmental determinism but found the link to the scenario much more difficult. Attempted applications were often commonsense – growing up in a musical family, for instance – when a precise psychological mechanism was required, for example, the influence of parental role models or the association between music and pleasure. Students who offered alternative forms of determinism, such as hard, soft or psychic, often gained the knowledge mark but invariably could not come up with a convincing link. For 02, students had to identify negatively skewed distribution by name, but many were not able to do that. A large percentage opted for positive skew, negative distribution or left skew, none of which received credit. However, it was still possible to pick up the elaboration for some comment about the relative position of the measures of central tendency, such as the mode being the largest value of the three. Question 03 was one of the least successfully answered questions on the paper. Those students who had misunderstood the previous question were not able to explain how the test could be modified to produce a more normal distribution. Even those who successfully negotiated 02 struggled. There were lots of references to creating completely new tests, particularly of motor skills, and whilst many of the suggestions were creative, they were not creditworthy. Most students were able to score at least 2 marks on question 04. Some notion that the researcher would be looking for a correlation between the two variables was the most popular route to the first mark, followed by reference to the drawing of a scattergraph. A small number of better-informed

students talked of the need to calculate a correlation coefficient, and still fewer suggested the use of a statistical test of significance, for example Spearman's. Many students also found question 05 challenging, particularly the first two definition marks. There were lots of outlines of cultural bias, rather than cultural relativism, and even when accurate knowledge was demonstrated, it was often overly concise. Students fared better when presenting their example of cultural relativism. There were some very good explanations of cross-cultural research in attachment, such as that conducted by Van Ijzendoorn, to illustrate the concept. Generally, students did perform reasonably well on question 06. Most recognised that the idiographic approach favours intensive study of the individual using qualitative methods, and that the aim is to carefully catalogue subjective experience rather than create general laws. Examples were often cited, though some of these slightly missed the point, such as the case study of Little Hans which was used by Freud to illustrate the 'universal' nature of the Oedipus complex. Most students offered at least two evaluative points of discussion, some based on reasoned comparison with the nomothetic approach. Many simply described the nomothetic approach without any direct comparison and scored less well as a result.

Section B:

Relationships

This was one of the better-answered sections on the paper. For question 07, lots of students described the key elements of Rusbult's model whilst making clear links to the stem. Some favoured an alternative route: describing the model in some detail first, then applying their knowledge towards the end of the answer. Whilst this was less economical, such answers were still able to score well. A fair number of students did little more than discuss the concept of investments, perhaps taken directly from the question, and made some speculative links to the stem. For question 08, there was a tendency for students to describe the theory of absence of gating whilst presenting it as evaluation – such as the idea that online relationships have the potential to benefit shy people, or there is increased disclosure on-line. Better answers made similar points, but these were at least rooted in evidence. This topic does seem to be one where students lapse into commonsense accounts of relationships which often verge on the anecdotal. There were many 16-mark essays on filter theory (09) that scored at the higher end of the mark range. Generally, students seemed to be well-prepared for this question and could convincingly, and often succinctly, describe the three levels – though occasionally these were presented in the wrong order. Application to the character in the stem was usually effective too. Where some answers did fall down was in the quality of the evaluation, sometimes denying them access to the top band. There were some vague references to studies, usually presented in generic format, that did not include key detail and so could not be identified. There was very good use of evidence too though: the outdated nature of the model was often discussed successfully, as was its cultural relativity.

Gender

Students generally found the Gender section challenging. The applied question on identification and internalisation (10) produced some lengthy descriptions with minimal links to the stem. Although the mark scheme allowed for material based on psychodynamic theory, social

learning theory or cognitive development, it was often unclear which approach students were taking, and answers appeared somewhat muddled as a result. Better answers drew a clear distinction between the two concepts in the question and made explicit links to the stem. Question 11 also proved troublesome for many. Lots of students seemed unsure how to tackle the question so simply wrote, sometimes at length, about specific gender stereotypes and subsequently did not score. There were attempts at evidence-based evaluations, but these were often not executed well. The best answers tended to provide a detailed account of one study, usually Smith and Lloyd, with analysis of how this illustrated the key concept at the end. The gender schema essay (Question 12) produced a very wide range of answers. There were some excellent responses that included detailed understanding of the concept of schema, the idea of ingroups/outgroups and how children disregard information that conflicts with their existing schema. Such knowledge was effectively linked to the information in the stem, and supported by evidence, typically the Martin and Halverson study, alongside reasoned comparison with Kohlberg's theory. There were also lots of answers that muddled gender schema and Kohlberg's theory or were simply too vague to gain much credit.

Cognitive Development

The scaffolding question (13) was one of the better answered questions on the paper. Many students demonstrated an excellent working knowledge of scaffolding, and its key elements, and were able to link most of these to the 'hooks' in the stem. Even those who were less well informed were able to achieve at least a couple of marks with a more global understanding of the concept. For question 14, some students missed the requirement to evaluate perspective taking research in the question, and instead simply described – typically Selman's – research. Some lower scoring responses offered generic methodological points that could have been reasonably applied to any study or studies and were not necessarily exclusive to perspective taking research. That said, there were many sophisticated full-mark answers here. Whilst the Piaget question (15) appeared quite narrow in its focus, there were some very good answers, and most students fared reasonably well. The most oft cited concept was object permanence, and this was clearly applied to the different developmental experiences of the two children in the stem. There were some excellent contrasts drawn with the work of Baillargeon in this context too. Many answers included description of the development of schema, and again, there were clear links made to 'Sonny' in the stem. Some answers erroneously talked about Piagetian concepts from later stages of the theory but recognising that both children were egocentric earned credit. General criticisms of Piaget's work that were not necessarily linked to the sensorimotor stage, but could feasibly have been, were still awarded marks.

Section C:

Schizophrenia

The 8-mark discussion question on family therapy (16) gave rise to quite a lot of commonsense content related to the family being supportive of the patient and helping them with their medication. More sophisticated accounts talked of the need for a therapeutic alliance between family members, psychoeducation and the theoretical underpinnings of the treatment – for example, to reduce dysfunctional communication. As part of evaluation, there were some

impressive discussions of relapse studies, but again, some points bordered on the trivial such as all the family not being able to attend appointments. The essay on the diathesis-stress model (17) was inadequately answered overall. Many students did not seem to have access to sufficient material upon which to construct a 16-mark response and offered very brief descriptions followed by minimal evaluation. As a consequence, there were some very short answers. More successful responses talked about the original version of the model followed by examples of how modern understanding of 'diathesis' and 'stress' came into being. There was often an overfocus on treatment as part of the evaluation, and whilst some of this material was certainly relevant, it did sometimes feel as though students were answering a different question. Finally, some students separated the two parts of the model – diathesis and stress – and dealt with each individually, almost as if they were writing two essays. Again, whilst this material was awarded credit, it did somewhat miss the point of a discussion of an interactionist approach to schizophrenia.

Eating Behaviour

Consistent with its status as the least popular option on the paper, examples of scripts that included Eating Behaviour were few and far between, but those that did attempt it, invariably performed well. The 8-mark boundary model question (18) tended to produce responses that were rich in description, but marginally less successful when it came to evaluation. Most were able to articulate the model as integrating ideas from restraint and disinhibition theory, as well as provide practical examples of how this would explain obesity. That said, there were several responses where reference to obesity was almost absent, and these tended not to progress beyond the middle bands. Although some students had access to evidence to support discussion, many did not, and their evaluation points were less convincing as a result. The 16-mark essay question on neural and hormonal influences (19) saw some impressive technical detail in many answers. Descriptions referred to both elements of the question and were accurate and detailed. That said, some students muddled the role of ghrelin and leptin, and the precise mechanisms involved. Discussion points in this question tended to be more sophisticated than for the previous question; the most popular being the use of animal studies and evidence involving lesioning.

Stress

Another generally well-answered section. For 20, most students were able to provide a summary of different types of social support – usually instrumental, emotional and esteem – supported by relevant examples. This was typically enough to satisfy the descriptive criteria required by the mark scheme. The evaluation was perhaps slightly less successful, but there was creditworthy commentary about the fact that some forms of support may not be welcomed and may even be inappropriate in some circumstances. There was a noticeable paucity of evidence for this question – students tended to confine themselves to general strengths and limitations rather than evidence-based discussion. The 16-mark essay on individual differences (21) was one of the most well answered on the paper. Many students were well versed in the different personality types: A, B, C and hardiness, and made explicit links to stress throughout. There were lots of examples of relevant evidence, though it was not uncommon for these to be a little muddled when it came to the detail – Kiecolt-Glaser's research was probably the main culprit here. Oddly, there were many accounts of the Johanneson sawmill study even though it

was not directly relevant to the question. That said, there were many very good answers for this question.

Section D:

Aggression

The first multiple-choice question did not prove troublesome for many students (22), but question 23 did wrongfoot some due to confusion between disinhibition and desensitisation. For 24, some students missed the instruction to talk about human aggression in the question and instead gave descriptive detail and examples of aggression in the animal kingdom. Responses that took male mating and reproductive success as the central theme tended to do best. The quality of evaluation in 25 generally mirrored the quality of answers in 24. Students who knew this area well were able to offer sustained critique to do with the problematic legitimisation of domestic violence implied by the theory, alongside broader themes of reductionism and determinism. The 16-mark essay on the situational explanation of institutional aggression (25) gave rise to some very good answers. Those students who framed their answer around the deprivation model and Sykes' five types of deprivation produced the better answers: matching concise descriptions of the various forms of deprivation to the relevant link in the stem and picking up marks quite quickly. There were some very good discussions of the situational model versus the importation model; however, those students who relied on the Stanford Prison Experiment as evidence often struggled to account for the passivity of the prisoners in that study and were left to rather spuriously focus on the behaviour of the guards.

Forensic

This topic was something of a 'tale of two halves.' Most students dealt very well with the short-answer questions, but the essay proved very challenging for the majority. That said, this probably meant that the three topic areas in this section were broadly comparable overall in terms of demand. The vast majority were able to identify option B as the correct answer for 26 and 27. Most students also experienced little difficulty outlining one aim of custodial sentencing in 28. Deterrence was the most popular response, closely followed by rehabilitation. Question 29 was well done too – even though some students continued to restate aims of sentencing rather than offer evaluative content. Many students wrote very well about the problem of high recidivism rates suggesting that offenders had not been rehabilitated during their time 'inside'. There were lots of references to the notion of a school for crime as well as reasoned debates about cost. In contrast, question 30 was a real struggle. The fact that there are two cognitive explanations of offending on the specification probably did not help. Many students were determined to write about minimalization and hostile attribution bias, and then tried, in vain, to link these to features of the stem. Those that did possess some knowledge of Kohlberg's stage theory could say very little beyond the need to avoid punishment and gain reward and then make limited links to the stem. There were very few answers that included discussion. Those that did criticised the moral dilemma technique on the basis of its hypothetical nature.

Addiction

Compared to the other two topic areas in Section D, students were more likely to struggle with the multiple-choice question here, and this was slightly more the case in 33 than 32. Question 34 presented students with few problems: most recognised that risk factors can be internal or external and were able to provide relevant examples. Very few students achieved fewer than the two marks available. The next evaluation question (35) was reasonably impressive too. Most had relevant evidence at their disposal for at least two risk factors, and this was often enough to score all four marks. In the absence of evidence, the argument that it is not realistic to study risk factors in isolation as this ignores their inter-related nature was often advanced to good effect. There were some very good answers for the 16-mark question on cognitive-behaviour therapy. Descriptive accounts often included some impressive technical detail of both cognitive and behavioural strategies, illustrated by examples and appropriate terminology. Where some students did struggle was with the application content. Because the stem described Ash's gaming addiction, students were required to apply features of this to a probable treatment plan – and this proved to be a tall order for many. In fact, there was a fair number of answers that included very high-level knowledge and discussion but no application at all. As is consistent with the 'best fit' approach to holistic marking, such responses were still able to score up to 12 marks.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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