

Examiners' Reports

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Psychology (J611)

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Chief Examiner's Report

There were some pleasing results this series with standards maintained from previous examinations. It was good to see that some candidates are taking advantage of the unitised nature of this GCSE and re-sitting with some success. We are looking forward to the next series of this examination when we will aggregate scores and award for this first time. Predictions would suggest that we should see similar rates of attainment as those seen on the legacy specification if the entry remains the same.

Once again, it has been noted (on all three papers) how many candidates are attempting all questions. Not only does this demonstrate that papers continue to be accessible to candidates but also provides further evidence that Centres are preparing their students well for the examinations.

As with last series, candidates' knowledge and understanding of key concepts, core studies and core theories is generally sound. However, knowledge and understanding of alternative theories seems to be weaker and so these theories should not be undervalued in the students' learning. Evaluation and analytical skills continue to improve especially when studies are under consideration. There is a need for candidates to focus those questions on applications. With a number of candidates, such questions are still eliciting common sense responses rather than responses with psychological substance.

B541 Studies and Applications in Psychology 1

General Comments

As with previous series, it was pleasing to see most candidates attempted all of the questions despite the fact that this is a non-tiered paper. Performance was generally commensurate with the last session but, within this, it was encouraging to see that many of the students re-sitting the examination improved on their previous performance. It was noted that many candidates coped well with the questions requesting limitations and criticisms, showing they had well developed evaluation skills.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Most candidates could correctly identify the chromosome pattern for females.
- 2 Most candidates could correctly identify the hormone associated with males.
- 3 The majority of candidates could offer an appropriate masculine and feminine behaviour. Candidates failed to score because they either offered a physical characteristic eg 'having muscles', or because their chosen behaviour was not obviously masculine or feminine eg 'being clever'.
- 4 The vast majority of candidates correctly identified the statements as 'false' and then 'true'.
- 5 Most candidates demonstrated knowledge of the Diamond & Sigmundson study, at least to the extent that they knew it focused on a boy raised as a girl. Some candidates were unclear as to the background to the case with some believing it was an actual experiment. Many candidates oversimplified the findings and a number lost focus by describing details not directly related to gender development eg sexuality, suicide. The best responses outlined why the boy was raised as girl, and explained the outcome of the case relating these to a clear conclusion. Due to lack of accuracy or coherency, rather than detail, a lot of responses were limited to 3 out of 4 marks.
- 6 Most candidates chose to outline limitations associated with generalisability – and this offered the best opportunity to score both marks. There were some good responses focusing on extraneous variables – such as the presence of a twin brother or the time spent being raised as a boy. Weaker responses tended to look at ethics but struggled to develop the point. There was a recurring problem of candidates giving descriptive responses rather than evaluative ones eg identifying that the study was done on one boy without being explicit about why that was a problem.
- 7 Most candidates attempted this question but most did not score. However, this question was designed to target the highest grades. Many answers were vague, merely describing what equal opportunities were. Some answers did not even focus on equal opportunities and just outlined gender concepts or gender differences. Some candidates could identify an area where equal opportunities is or could be employed but this earned them no more than one mark. Only a minority of candidates could go beyond this and relate this to research, and very few actually outlined strategies for promoting equal opportunities for different sexes.
- 8 The vast majority of candidates correctly identified the statements as 'false' then 'true'.

- 9** Over half of the candidates were able to earn a mark for defining deprivation but common errors were to simply redefine the term using the verb 'deprive' or to define privation instead. Most of the candidates that scored on (a)(i) were able to score on (a)(ii) by giving an appropriate example of deprivation with death and a hospital stay being the most common. Candidates that correctly defined deprivation also tended to correctly define privation but did find it more difficult to score on the example. This was because many examples failed to identify the timings of adoptions, neglect etc which is obviously significant in privation. A common error was to assume that privation was the forming of some kind of attachment.
- 10** This question was a good discriminator. Most candidates earned marks here but the range of marks was elicited by the question. The two most popular criticisms pertained to Bowlby's ideas of monotropy and the critical period – and although marks could be earned for identifying these as problems only better responses went on to clearly explain why they are problematic. Candidates were reasonably successful at contrasting evidence for multiple attachments with the idea of monotropy but were less successful at explaining evidence against or alternatives to the critical period and at this point made a lot of assumptions about the reader's knowledge. Other criticisms were creditworthy eg instinct vs learning but a criticism often offered but not creditworthy was the idea that Bowlby claimed that infants can only attach to mothers.
- 11** Although the majority of candidates scored full marks here, the fabricated term 'secure-insecure' was selected more often than expected. The most common error though was to muddle the two types of insecure attachment in the table.
- 12** A lot of candidates scored both marks here with clear and valid limitations. If anything, some candidates went into more detail than necessary given the fact there was one mark on offer for each limitation.
- 13** This was supposed to be a relatively straightforward question but, as with previous series, too many candidates seem to be ignoring the instruction to use the source – for example, on (a), giving their own examples of formal settings. 13(c) was worse answered with a number of candidates offering 'denial of responsibility' as the phrase illustrating 'defiance' – despite these being separate concepts on the specification.
- 14** Nearly all candidates demonstrated some knowledge of the Bickman study with a clear focus on the findings, as required by the question. The modal score was two – candidates who scored three tended to draw a clear conclusion as well as identifying the basic results of the study. A common error was to draw a conclusion that considered the effect of the person rather than the effect of the uniform.
- 15** This question was well answered with the vast majority of candidates getting two marks.
- 16** Most candidates knew to offer a context for the application with prisons followed by schools being the two most popular examples. However, many candidates then struggled to explain the use of certain techniques for establishing obedience eg *how* uniform is used and so found themselves limited to one mark. There were some generic responses which did not gain credit because it was not clear how research was being or would be applied. A common error was to describe Milgram's electric shock experiment here. Although this research is potentially relevant, candidates failed to apply it.

- 17** This was the lowest scoring question overall and the one that candidates were most likely to omit, despite a similar question being asked on a previous paper in the specimen assessment material. A common error was to outline situational factors rather than dispositional ones. Where candidates did recognise the demands of the question, few said more than obedience was related to personality and that personality was a consequence of upbringing. Consequently, very few candidates earned beyond two marks. High scoring responses tended to use Adorno's theory of the authoritarian personality to answer the question, making clear links between its traits and obedient behaviours. Interestingly, Milgram 'popped up' quite a lot here too. It was almost as though certain candidates were determined to write about his study somewhere – even if it was not appropriate to!
- 18** There were some good, concise definitions of 'encoding' although some candidates simply reiterated the word (or a derivation of it in their answer (and scored zero). There was some evidence of some candidates muddling this stage with other stages of information processing – especially 'storage'.
- 19** Most candidates could identify a relevant memory aid – usually by name. A number of candidates earned a second mark by describing that memory aid, although this often relied on a shared knowledge of the memory aids as descriptions lacked clarity. It was the third mark which was elusive for most candidates. Those that did earn it, normally did so by explaining how their chosen memory aid worked.
- 20** Most candidates earned two marks here – first by identifying a limitation and then either explaining why it was a limitation or by describing it further. As with similar questions on this paper, there was a tendency for some candidates to offer a description of a feature of study rather than being purely evaluative. For example, stating that Terry used a laboratory experiment or that he used students is descriptive and these were not credited as limitations. However, stating that Terry used artificial conditions or that he used a biased sample is evaluative and would have been creditworthy.
- 21** Most candidates did use the source initially, but did not select the right information. A common mistake was to suggest that repetition of slogans prevented displacement. After such a mistake, candidates struggled to find the right answers for (b) with many coming up with their own techniques rather than using those in the source.
- 22** There were many decent responses here with the modal mark being four. For most candidates, there were few problems describing the multi-store model, and a number offered much more detail than was necessary for the 4 AO1 marks available. Only a minority of candidates made the mistake of focusing on stages of memory rather than the stores. There were two main issues that limited the majority of candidates to four marks – either no or very weak evaluation of the model, or a lack of coherency, accuracy and/or detail. Candidates should be aware that responses to 6 mark question are assessed using bands and to attain five or six marks there are certain criteria that need to be met which go beyond content – this includes judging spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- 23** Parts (a) and (b) were answered correctly by most. Most candidates also earned the mark for (c) but some need to take more care with their spelling of 'arachnophobia' especially where it can be mistaken for acrophobia.
- 24** Most candidates scored one mark here but only a few managed to earn both marks. Most candidates struggled to say more than atypical behaviour is abnormal/unusual behaviour, etc – but they could have also redefined behaviour or explained what makes something atypical eg it applies to a minority. Some candidates made the mistake of thinking atypical behaviour is a typical behaviour and this was reflected in their definitions.

- 25** As with Question 14, there was a good focus on findings (as required). As with Question 14, candidates struggled to earn the third mark. Candidates should expect to earn three marks for describing the findings of studies and so should ensure they have enough to say – in this case, for example, candidates tended to earn additional marks for referring to stimulus generalisation as well as the more obvious effects of conditioning and the induced fear of a rat.
- 26** This question was generally well answered, with a just a few cases where answers overlapped and could only be awarded one of the two marks.
- 27** Most candidates chose the behaviourist explanation of atypical behaviour with the chosen behaviour, not surprisingly, being phobias. As expected, there were a variety of descriptions with some simplistic ones that focused on the role of experience and more sophisticated which took the reader through the stages of classical conditioning and even went on to the outline the role of operant conditioning. The evaluation offered more variety again, with some candidates not attempting this part of the essay and others giving a series of well elaborated criticisms. A surprising number of candidates chose evolutionary theory (the alternative theory on the specification) as their 'lead' theory and although there were some decent description, few candidates had the knowledge and/or ability to adequately evaluate this theory. Some candidates attempted to use social learning theory to explain phobias and, although feasible, few did a good job of this. A common error was to describe classical conditioning in the context of other behaviours (Pavlov's dogs being popular) rather than in the context of phobias – this limited marks at best to the middle band. Some essays scored little or nothing because they were general descriptions of different types of phobias, or because they focused on treatment which was only implicitly relevant. Overall, few essays scored in the top band – this was due to a lack of good evaluation where the issue was more to do with a lack of breadth in the commentary rather than a lack of depth.

B542 Studies and Applications in Psychology 2

General Comments

The entry for this unit was small as most Centres are using it for their terminal examination in June. Despite this, there was a good distribution of results covering the range of grades. As with B541, it was pleasing to see that most candidates attempted all questions including those that were designed to essentially assess the most able candidates.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 This straightforward question saw the vast majority of candidates getting full marks. Some candidates clearly misread or misunderstood the source and included 'pointed chin' as one of their three features. A significant minority of candidates scored zero because they offered their own examples of criminal features rather than using those in the source as directed.
- 2 Nearly all candidates got this question right by recognising that first statement was 'false' and then the next one was 'true'.
- 3 Few candidates scored full marks here, and the remaining scores were distributed relatively evenly across the remaining candidates. Most knew what was meant by brain dysfunction and redefined this as part of their response earning one mark. However, others confused physiological defects with cognitive deficits. Another common error was candidates describing aspects of criminal behaviour without relating this to any part of the brain. Weaker answers tended to just list parts of the brain implicated in criminal behaviour or muddled the functions of these parts of the brain. Stronger answers made clear links between the function of different parts of the brain and how they impact on criminal behaviour when not functioning as normal.
- 4 Some candidates found this question very straightforward, stating two clear criticisms of the biological theory of criminal behaviour. There were some problems with candidates offering two similar criticisms which overlapped and therefore earned only one mark over all. Common errors included simply describing an alternative explanation without showing why it was evaluative, or offering limitations of research which were not directly relevant to the theory. Candidates should also be aware that it is not enough to simply say that one theory ignores another as a criticism.
- 5 Virtually all candidates got part (a) right and the almost as many got part (b) right too. The problem with some responses to part (b) was that they did not relate specifically enough to the source.
- 6 Most candidates earned a mark here for identifying a relevant technique or system for reducing crime. However, many were limited to this one mark because they were unable to adequately elaborate on the technique/system in a meaningful way. The best responses were clear on the psychology behind techniques such as imprisonment, rehabilitation, censoring of media, etc.
- 7 This question presented few problems for candidates although some did offer the emotions felt by the characters in the source rather than focusing on non-verbal behaviours.

- 8** The majority of candidates scored full marks here demonstrating sound knowledge of the Yuki et al study. It was very unusual for a candidate to get more than one of the features wrong.
- 9** Most candidates scored both marks here. A common error was for candidate to draw three lines rather than the two required – this limited them to one mark even though two of the lines were generally correctly placed.
- 10** Only a minority of candidates scored both marks here. Many candidates recognised they needed two statements to earn the two marks but quite often the statements said the same thing – either through repetition or by offering an example that simply illustrated the point already made. Good answers highlighted a problematic feature of the social learning theory and then went on to explain why it was a problem for the theory. A common error was to suggest that cross cultural variations in non-verbal communication was evidence against the theory when clearly it is evidence for and therefore not a valid criticism.
- 11** Although better answered than a similar question on a previous series, there were still too many common sense responses which had little psychological substance. Some candidates gave inappropriate examples which were more to do with upbringing and socialisation rather than the more structured process of social skills training. Weaker answers identified client groups for and/or outcomes of social skills training whereas the better answers could name and outline specific techniques used as part of the process. There were a large number of vague answers which basically said that it was about teaching people to change their body language and facial expressions – such responses did not demonstrate enough accurate knowledge to gain credit.
- 12** Candidates were more successful at identifying Joe's stage of development compared to Halina's – although, over all, most candidates did score two.
- 13** According to this question, candidates had a better understanding of object permanence than egocentrism.
- 14** This question on decentring had the highest number of candidates scoring zero and the highest omission rate. All the same, a number of candidates managed to earn one mark – usually for recognising the outcome of decentring is to be able to see another point of view. Only very few candidates got across the idea that it possible to see two viewpoints at once rather than just another person's. The best answers focused on appreciating two features of a situation (which may or may not include viewpoints).
- 15** The idea that Piaget's stages of cognitive development are too rigid was a commonly offered criticism. Some candidates made this point quite implicitly – often limiting themselves to one mark. Other candidates were able to elaborate (often through more specific examples of this). A common error was criticise aspects of Piaget's research rather than the theory itself – if candidates are going to take this approach they need to be able to explain the impact of a methodological limitation on the validity of the theory. For example, the limited sample is not a criticism of the theory itself but the fact this makes the theory culturally biased is. It is important to make this distinction, since one of Piaget's study occurs separately on the specification and so this is where methodological limitations become relevant (as with Question 17 on this paper).
- 16** Candidates generally demonstrated a sound knowledge of Vygotsky's theory and the full range of marks was elicited by this question. Weaker responses tended to focus on what the theory did not believe in rather than what it did, or spoke very vaguely about the impact of environment and/or others. Stronger responses outlined key ideas such as zone of proximal development, scaffolding, use of cultural tools, significance of language and children as apprentices.

- 17** This question divided candidates into those who did not understand the requirement to evaluate and those that did. The former tended to describe the core study as their response. Those that understood the demands of the question were able to offer a range of limitations of the study with most of the high scoring responses relying on breath of commentary rather than any real depth. That was acceptable in the case of this 4 mark question in a way that would not be acceptable in an actual essay question.
- 18** Candidates did well on this question with nearly all scoring full marks.
- 19** A range of scores were awarded here. A significant number of candidates did not respond to the question clearly not knowing where to start. For those that did attempt to answer the question, a common error was to describe features of the study eg people may have low self-esteem, people are seen as individuals – rather than evaluate the theory. In some of these cases the criticism may have been implicit but this was not good enough to be credited. Another problem was that there were a number of overlapping criticisms so only one could be credited – such criticisms tended to centre on the lack of scientific rigour. Having said all this, there were some impressive responses (especially for a two mark question) which demonstrated clear insight into the flaws of the humanistic theory of self.
- 20** It was unusual for candidates to score high marks here but those that did clearly had a very good understanding of the processes involved in counselling. Not only were they able to identify a number of key features of counselling but they were able to relate them to each other, and to the outcomes of the therapy, in a coherent way. Some very long responses scored zero because they actually had very little substance and/or 'borrowed' too heavily from other parts of this section. Some candidates got 'stuck' on one mark because they could do little more than identify potential client groups.
- 21** It was good to see that many candidates had read the question carefully and only described the study as required. However, given the fact that some candidates rarely evaluate, this may have been by chance rather than design for some! The Van Houtte & Jarvis study lends itself to a detailed description and many candidates did not disappoint on this score. There were a number of candidates who were limited to four marks because their response (although detailed) did not meet the other criteria for a top band mark. Nearly all candidates showed some familiarity with the study but common errors were candidates misunderstanding the matching process in the study, candidates oversimplifying the findings and candidates identifying the study as an experiment.
- 22** Nearly all candidates got this question right earning both marks. As with Question 9, there was a problem with some candidates drawing more than two lines.
- 23** The modal mark on this question was 3 showing good understanding of its demands. Most candidates could name two depth cues and it was likely that both would credit since the picture used in the exam paper contained many. Candidates were less successful at applying them to the picture. Some did not even attempt this and instead described the depth cue in general terms (which received no further credit). Others were not specific enough about how the cues showed depth in the picture merely locating where the depth cues were. There was some mismatching of depth cues and the application to the picture (height in plane and relative size were regularly confused) – this accounted for a number of the candidates only earning 3 out of 4 marks. Another reason for many candidates scoring three was because they struggled to adequately explain the presence of linear perspective in the picture having identified it. This seemed to be less of an issue for other, potentially more straightforward, depth cues.

- 24** The most common score on this question was two showing that most candidates had some insight into the question and how to answer it. Two was common because either candidates could say a little about both types of processing or because they could explain top-down processing (but not do the same for bottom-up processing). Candidates need to be aware that with this kind of question there needs to be some explicit distinction between the concepts to earn higher marks – it is not enough to simply juxtapose two separate definitions.
- 25** Although this question was relatively open in terms of what study could be described, not surprisingly the core study (Haber & Levin's) was most commonly offered. However, there were some reasonable attempts to describe other studies such as Hudson's cross-cultural study and Gibson & Walk's neonate study (although the evaluation on these tended to be quite limited). A significant minority of candidates described research into cognitive development which clearly could not be credited in this case. There were many impressive descriptions of the Haber & Levin study which included clear and accurate detail. Candidates seemed to produce the most coherent responses when they only focused on the main experiment in the study rather than trying to include the preliminary experiment too. Weaker descriptions demonstrated poor understanding of the difference between the objects in the different conditions in the study – a number of candidates talked about familiar and unfamiliar objects. The evaluation was more limited on this essay, with many candidates only able to comment on the nature of the sample. Candidates really needed to comment on other aspects of the study to earn marks in the top band. There was also a tendency to list evaluation points rather than developing a discussion which limited a number of essays to the middle band and a maximum of seven marks.

B543 Research in Psychology

General Comments

A significant number of candidates showed a good level of knowledge and understanding of conducting research in psychology. It was pleasing to see a high number of candidates using a good level of psychological terminology in their responses. Candidates are encouraged to pay particular attention to their usage of psychological key words as these were often confused.

A very high proportion of candidates attempted all the questions on the paper thus demonstrating the paper was accessible to almost all candidates. A key feature of this paper is application. Whilst the number of candidates successfully drawing information from the source material is high, candidates are encouraged to continue contextualising their responses using the source material provided.

Candidates are also encouraged to pay particular attention to the questions and go beyond defining key concepts where a description or explanation is required.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Almost all candidates scored full marks here, successfully identifying the aim of the study from the source material.
- 2 Candidate responses ranged on this question. Whilst a number of candidates scored full marks, correctly identifying the variables and that an alternate hypothesis predicts a difference, some responses gave an aim or a statement as opposed to a hypothesis. The reference to a correlation was also frequently seen.
- 3
 - (a) The majority of candidates interpreted the data from the source material correctly.
 - (b) The majority of candidates successfully manipulated the data to give the correct response.
- 4 A well answered question with a significant number of candidates being able to identify descriptive data. Errors included reference to numerical or written data only.
- 5 The majority of candidates could correctly identify a weakness of using an opportunity sample. However, only a minority contextualised the weakness with the source material.
- 6 A well answered question with a significant number of candidates achieving full marks.
- 7 A high number of candidates could give a definition of social desirability but a significant number of definitions were not explained or explored. Only a minority of candidates could contextualise their response with the study in the source.
- 8 The majority of candidates were not clear about why standardised instructions are used in research. Very few were aware of their use as a form of control. Many candidates made reference to the idea that they would make the results easier for the researcher to collate or to the questionnaire being easier to understand.
- 9 A well answered question.

- 10** The majority of candidates could explain how closed questions differed from open questions. A minority only described one question type or gave an example of a question but with no explanation as to which type.
- 11** (a) The majority of candidates achieved full marks here by successfully drawing the comparison between structured and unstructured interviews. However, a small proportion of responses only outlined one interview type.
- (b) A good number of candidates could identify a strength of an interview. Candidates are encouraged to expand on responses where a description is required, as candidates who failed to achieve the second mark did not go beyond the identification.
- 12** This was one of the lowest achieving questions with only the minority encompassing the entire concept of cultural bias in research. Those candidates who achieved 1 mark gave vague or partial responses with no explanation.
- 13** (a) A generally well answered question where most candidates were able to recognise a null hypothesis as predicting no difference between the variables. A minority of candidates stated an aim, provided a statement, or referred to no correlation between the variables.
- (b) (i) A very well answered question with a significant number of candidates identifying a suitable sampling method.
- (ii) Candidates are encouraged to contextualise their responses to their investigation, as very few provided justifications for their choice of sampling method in light of their research design.
- (c) Despite there being some very good answers here, many candidates failed to show an understanding of observation as a research method. Responses referring to administering questionnaires or using an independent groups experimental design was frequently seen. Candidates should be careful not to give details of the procedure that has been assessed in the previous question (ie the sampling method) or to provide justifications for their procedure in this part of the question.
- (d) There was a poor response to this question with very few candidates demonstrating knowledge of inter-rater reliability and how this could be achieved. Where correct explanations were given, very few were contextualised to the design of their investigation.
- (e) This was a poorly answered question. Where an unsuitable control was given it was often reflective of those responses that gave an incorrect research method in part 13c. Those candidates who did provide an appropriate control, failed to explain their answer in light of their observation.
- (f) Many candidates identified a strength of using an observation. However, a significant number of candidates failed to contextualise their strength or to give an explanation of why it would be a strength of the observation method.

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