A-LEVEL
PSYCHOLOGY

7182/3 Issues and options in psychology
Report on the Examination

7182
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General

In contrast to previous performance, more students were able to access marks at the top of the range, perhaps because of the accessibility of extended response questions in Sections C and D. Although many students seemed well prepared for the examination, there were some notable gaps in knowledge and understanding, particularly in relation to the question on distribution. A further challenge was noted on Section D where the 6 mark questions required evaluation only, but students often preceded any evaluation with lengthy descriptions, particularly in the Aggression topic. A number of questions this year required a combination of three skills, knowledge and understanding, application and discussion. The very best answers to these questions tended to be those where students could integrate application and knowledge, linking several different aspects of psychological theory/evidence to the stem material. Some of the short-answer definition questions required clarity and coherence for full marks. Sadly, it was often the case that evidently knowledgeable answers gained limited credit because the answer was confused and/or showed inappropriate use of specialist terminology.

Relationships and Gender continue to be the most popular options in Section A. Schizophrenia is still by far the most popular option in Section B. Aggression and Forensic psychology are the most favoured options in Section C.

Section A – Issues and debates

Question 01

This question appeared to discriminate quite well. Most students could recognise holism, whilst the least well recognised was universality.

Question 02

Definitions were not always clear and there was often confusion with generalisation. Mere statements that the nomothetic approach did not take account of individual differences were not sufficient as a limitation without some explanation.

Question 03

Performance on this question was surprisingly poor because many students focussed on causes of behaviour rather than measurement. Answers had to be contextualised in order to gain credit.

Question 04

Most students gained some credit here and there were some excellent straightforward suggestions. High scoring answers often suggested the use of a Likert scale with scale and gave example statements, or observations of behaviour in the queue, with examples of behavioural categories and details of event or time sampling. There were some ingenious suggestions, such as analysing facial expressions from the photographs taken by auto cameras at the top of the roller coaster. Other ideas were just too impractical or implausible to credit. Vague suggestions, such as 'interview them in the queue and ask how they feel' gained limited credit, but a few responses were just too brief, for example, simply stating 'interview' or 'questionnaire'. A few biological suggestions were seen.

Question 05

Most students gained some credit and many full mark responses were seen. Quite frequently, students conflated several strengths/limitations rather than sticking to one, with the result that the strength/limitation lacked clarity and therefore did not gain full marks. In this case, the more successful answers were those where students chose one and stayed with it. Given the preceding questions, it was not entirely surprising that some students wrote entirely about biological reductionism but this did not seem to affect their ability to access to marks.

Question 06

It was quite clear from many of the weaker answers that students did not understand the meaning of 'implications'. As a result, many responses focussed on issues rather than implications, and consequently some answers scored no marks. Fortunately for many students, some issues-based answers happened to gain marks incidentally where they came to recount examples of instances of 'harm to participants', which could legitimately be seen as an implication of the research for the participants. Such cases usually arose in the context of studies of social influence. Better answers covered wide-ranging issues of the type seen in the mark scheme and made good use of such diverse topics as IQ testing, defining abnormality, Bowlby's influence on attitudes to child-rearing and gender research. Any psychological topic was valid. Some answers were excessively long, possibly because students had prepared for a 16-mark question on this area.

Section B – Relationships or Gender or Cognition and development

Relationships

Question 07

Most students gained some credit, although outlines often lacked clarity or were confused, for example, stating that equity meant equal. Quite a number of the outlines sounded much more like social exchange theory.

Question 08

Most answers consisted of a prolonged outline followed by a very brief limitation, which was stated rather than explained. As a consequence, relatively few answers were awarded marks in the top level. Outlines focussing on inter and intra sexual selection were commonly seen and often comprehensive. In these responses, it was usual to see limited applicability to non-heterosexual relationships or lack of relevance to modern society as the limitation. Some quite detailed outlines failed to address the matter of 'preferences' as per the question, although preference was often implicit. Weak responses were anecdotal, typically arguing that 'men are not fussy', and 'women are picky'.

Question 09

Marks were awarded independently for this question so many answers gained a mark for identification of strata. Whilst the stem was meant to cue the students in to 'the 4 schools' as strata, some students invented possible strata of their own, for example, male/female or A Level subjects studied. Thereafter, marks were less easily gained because further credit was dependent on whether or not students could explain the need for proportionality in the sample. References to proportionality were not always explicit; other terms could receive credit, for example, many

students used the word 'ratio' which was accepted. It was also acceptable and quite commonly the case that the idea was explained through the use of a concrete example, or via a mathematical formula. Having achieved marks for strata and proportionality, it was then possible to be credited for the random selection from each stratum. Relatively few answers did attain full marks.

Question 10

This question tended to yield high marks, with confidentiality, withdrawal of data, enquiries about possible harm and explanation of the aim as the basis of most answers. Verbatim responses tended to gain the higher marks, usually because they included fairly elaborate explanation as would typically occur when dealing with real participants. Some answers strayed into reasons why certain points would be important, which was not really answering the question. Despite taking a fairly eclectic approach to what might be construed as 'ethical', examiners occasionally noted points of general small talk that were not deemed creditworthy, such as 'Have you travelled far?'

Question 11

Performance on this question depended on whether or not students were able to organise their response efficiently and address the three skills in a relatively short time. Less well scoring answers got bogged down in theory of maternal deprivation and barely mentioned parasocial relationships, or wasted time explaining the three different levels or types of parasocial relationship and forgot to mention attachment theory. There was some confusion with the absorption-addiction model. Effective discussion tended to centre around use of evidence or the possible benefits of parasocial relationships, but was not very common. Students sometimes wasted valuable time on anecdotal account of the effects of the death of famous people.

Gender

Question 12

Many answers gained only 1 mark, either because they lacked clarity and coherence, or because they lacked any explicit cognitive element.

Question 13

Most answers gained marks in Level 2. A common error here was to present a detailed outline of social learning theory with only brief reference to gender. In the worst cases, the answer was almost entirely devoid of gender content and therefore gained little, if any, credit. Mainstream answers consisted of a reasonable outline with some link to gender, and a briefly noted strength. To attain Level 3 marks the strength required explanation, and despite the question requiring only one strength, some students presented a list leaving the examiner to try to disentangle them and award credit for the best.

Question 14

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Question 16

As in the case of the parallel questions, marks were largely dependent on the ability to organise material and address the three skills in limited time. Despite the diverse requirements, answers tended to be high scoring with many accurate and through accounts of Bem's work, including the BSRI and more general theory. Whilst most students offered some valid application, it was surprisingly rare to see effective links to self-esteem. Discussions varied both in terms of content and quality, with many of the better answers commenting on relevance in relation to social changes since Bem's original work.

Cognition and development

Question 17

Students who evidently knew the concept often presented answers in the form of illustrative examples rather than giving a clear definition, and thereby gained limited credit. Class inclusion was sometimes confused with other Piagetian ideas such as centration, whereby children can deal with only one property of an object at a time. Some answers indicated that students had no idea of the meaning at all, for example, where they stated it was about sharing and being kind to everyone in the class.

Question 18

Most answers gained credit in Level 2. Occasionally, students wrote a great deal about theory of mind and barely mentioned autism. Other students presented long accounts of the Sally-Anne study but said little about theory of mind. The strength often lacked explanation, or, despite the question requiring only one strength, students presented a list leaving the examiner to try to disentangle them and award marks for the best.

Question 19

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Question 20

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Question 21

This question was often well answered, but, as in the case of the parallel questions, marks were largely dependent on the ability to organise material and address the three skills in limited time. What might have been very worthy accounts of Vygotsky's theory were sometimes marred by students' lack of ability to use specialist terminology effectively. Discussion tended to focus on implications for education and comparisons with Piaget. Despite there being ample scope for application, this was often very limited, with the barest mention that 'students who say they are helped in the classroom would learn better'.

Section C – Schizophrenia or Eating behaviour or Stress

Schizophrenia

Question 22

Some answers were quite vague but most were able to gain limited credit by giving an example of a disorder that often occurs alongside schizophrenia, usually depression. Where this question was poorly answered it was often because students confused co-morbidity with symptom overlap.

Question 23

This was generally well-answered, although some responses were unnecessarily long. The best answers were those that started by saying what symptom overlap is, then went on to address the problem. Quite a number of students could say what the problem might be (eg misdiagnosis) but failed to adequately explain the role of 'symptom overlap' in this.

Question 24

This was without doubt the worst answered question on the whole paper, with a modal mark of 0. Most students failed to address the issue of distribution and instead gave lengthy interpretations of the data in the table, comparing the measures of central tendency for the two groups and attempting to draw conclusions in relation to the study. The poor performance on this question illustrates the importance of reading questions carefully and thinking carefully about what the question means. It is likely that, having seen many examples of data interpretation questions with tables on previous papers, students automatically thought that this was a similar question and responded according. It is also likely that many students left the examination hall believing that

they had answered this question well. A lucky minority of students who were not actually answering the question at all nevertheless managed to gain 1 mark by incidentally noting that the measures of central tendency for Group A were all about the same. A very small minority who understood the point of the question gained 4 marks very swiftly, often in a single sentence. A handful of students illustrated their answers with sketches of a bell-shaped curve and a positive skew.

Question 25

Many answers were very well prepared, or perhaps well learned, with detailed accounts of genetic evidence, dopamine and neural correlates. Whilst knowledge was generally detailed and accurate, discussions sometimes revealed limited understanding or strayed off the topic. A typical example of this is where students might present drug evidence in support of the role of dopamine, then fell into discussion of the use of drugs and comparison with other treatments/therapies. Some answers showed significant confusion, lack of understanding or only the loosest grasp of terminology, for example, weak answers talked of 'dopamine flowing round the body' and 'parts swelling in the brain'. It is worth noting that some of the most successful answers were from those brave students who opted for a depth approach and focused on a single biological explanation. Limiting the range of material meant that they had time to provide detailed description and fully elaborated discussion.

Eating behaviour

Question 26

This was usually well answered, with most students choosing restraint or disinhibition. Even weak answers usually managed to gain one mark.

Question 27

This was generally well answered, either through use of evidence, or through relating the theory to everyday experiences of dieters.

Question 28

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Question 29

This question elicited some detailed responses, although the knowledge was not always accurate. As with question 25, students often tried to include too much and would have been better to limit

the range of material, giving themselves time to provide detailed knowledge and more thorough discussion. A number of the weakest answers attempted a response based solely on ghrelin and leptin. It was evident from some answers that students would have preferred a question on psychological explanations.

Stress

Question 30

This tended to be well answered, with many strong accounts of stress inoculation therapy and drug therapy. Biofeedback was not always so well done, usually because students failed to be clear about the reinforcement element.

Question 31

Content varied according to the therapy used in Q30, but most scored at least one mark.

Question 32

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Question 33

This question was often very well answered, with some quite detailed accounts of the physiological mechanisms involved. Most answers referred to immunosuppression, and associated evidence and the body of research into the link between stress and cardiovascular disorders was used to good effect. The mediating effects of personality type often formed part of the discussion, but relatively few students opted to discuss the way in which workplace stress might result in illness, perhaps because they had compartmentalised their material and did not see it as appropriate.

Section D – Aggression or Forensic psychology or Addiction

Aggression

Question 34

Most students gained at least one mark for this question.

Question 35

This was generally quite poorly answered, with many answers comprising a long paragraph of description followed by a cursory evaluation point, usually reference to supporting evidence. Some evaluations did little more than to suggest desensitisation was a good explanation for aggression because it explained it. Several very weak responses gave lurid accounts of well-known examples of crimes that had been attributed to perpetrators having been exposed to media violence. A few students confused desensitisation with deindividuation.

Question 36

This tended to be very well answered, with many students referring to deindividuation, frustration-aggression and more general social psychological concepts, such as conformity and social learning. Many answers contained minimal application, merely noting the relevant comment from the table as being an example of whatever explanation was under discussion. Some really excellent answers presented whole paragraphs of integrated knowledge and application, teasing out aspects, for example, of deindividuation, and linking them to the scenario. Discussion points varied in terms of content and effectiveness, with the least effective being those that talked in a highly generic way about reductionism, determinism and nature nurture.

Forensic psychology

Question 37

Most students gained at least one mark for this question.

Question 38

This question was well answered, with many students presenting issues such as scientific racism and use of evidence. Evaluations varied immensely in terms of clarity and coherence.

Question 39

This was usually well answered, with many effective responses including material on restorative justice, token economy and anger management. Whilst many answers were detailed and well applied, the application here was often less well-developed than in Q36. Where students performed less well overall it was often because knowledge was lacking, for example, where token economy was presented there was little or no reference to operant conditioning theory and reinforcement. Similarly, with restorative justice, the knowledge in some responses consisted of 'a meeting between the victim and the offender'. Relatively few answers used custodial sentencing as the basis for a response, and those that did, tended to score lower marks. Discussions were often informed and well elaborated.

Addiction

Question 40

The majority of students scored full marks on this question.

Question 41

This was often badly answered, usually because students confused the model with a treatment.

Question 42

There were many high scoring responses. Most answers referred to combinations of drug therapy, aversion therapy and covert sensitisation. Very few used cognitive behaviour therapy. Weaker responses were characterised by sparse knowledge, for example, students referring to drug therapy failed to explain the difference between the effects of agonists and antagonists. Similarly, explanations of the conditioning principles underpinning aversion/covert sensitisation were absent from the weaker answers. As with parallel questions, applications ranged from merely likening a named way to one of the quotes in the Table, to detailed and sustained explanatory links with different aspects of the therapy.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.