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GCSE

# PSYCHOLOGY

8182/2: Paper 2 Social context and behaviour  
Report on the Examination

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## General comments

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 2019. Where appropriate, it will also offer guidance as to how future performances might be improved; for teachers and students.

This was the first Paper 2 examination for this specification and therefore also the first year for a number of new requirements, such as 9 mark extended answer questions and 9 mark synoptic questions. While a number of areas clearly proved challenging, many students appeared to be prepared for this new style of paper. The paper seemed to discriminate well and provided a good spread of marks.

While papers now contain fewer multiple-choice type questions and there has been a move towards these being a test of knowledge and understanding, answers were generally of a good standard. However, there were some exceptions, namely 15.1 and 15.2.

As part of the new specification, students' knowledge of research methods and maths can now be examined through-out all of the topic areas in both papers. There were some very positive signs with students doing well on some questions (such as 8.3, 11.1 and 2). However an area of particular weakness was 8.2, where students were asked to provide an alternative hypothesis. It is highly recommend 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.

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:

- Some students continue to write answers outside of the allocated space provided and in some cases, answers were written in blank spaces below other items. This can result in complete answers not automatically being scanned. Please ensure that students are aware that the ONLY place where answers should be continued is on the additional sheets provided and NOT in blank spaces in the answer booklet itself.
- 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 tiny handwriting results in answers that are very challenging to read. They should also be encouraged to write as legibly as possible.
- Students should be encouraged to clearly identify which question their answer on the additional sheets refers to; for example, writing '2.2' rather than just '2' or providing no number at all.

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

## **Section A: Social Influence**

### **Question 2.1**

Unfortunately, many answers simply described conformity and this resulted in a minority getting all 3 marks. For the answers that did identify a social factor (about half), the most popular choice was 'group size'.

It was noticeable through-out the Social Influence topic that many students are not clear on which factors are social and which are dispositional. 2.1 was one of several questions where the use of the wrong type of factor resulted in no marks being awarded.

### **Question 2.2**

Answers to this question were mixed and depended largely on whether students evaluated the described study or Asch's study. Students were not penalised for evaluating elements of Asch's study that were also in the description of the study in 2.1. However, marks were not awarded for answers about the problems of generalising the sample or to references made about 'child of its time'. Good answers tended to address the artificial nature of the task and the ethical issue of deception.

Answers to all evaluation questions across the paper saw a strong reliance on the use of generic answers (e.g. lacks ecological validity). Such generic statements are not always relevant and are unlikely to receive many, or any, marks even when they are.

### **Question 3**

Over half of answers to this question received some credit and a small number gave clear and detailed responses. One of the common reasons for answers receiving no marks was that they only gave descriptions of Milgram's study or of Adorno's theory of authoritarian personality. Some responses focussed solely on social factors affecting obedience but did not refer back to Milgram's Agency theory. This limited the marks they were able to receive.

### **Question 4**

Students found it difficult to get into the top level in this question, with a significant minority giving level 3 answers. There were a number of common issues that prevented answers from gaining top marks. One of these was that students described Adorno's theory instead of evaluating it. Another issue was the evaluation of the F-scale without specific links to Adorno's theory. Some answers referred to the contrary evidence from Milgram's electric shock study. However, it was not always clear that students were aware that this was research carried out by a different researcher.

### **Question 5.1**

Unfortunately, many students did not use an alternative word to 'behaviour' (such as 'actions'). This meant that they were not showing full understanding of what the term 'collective behaviour' means. It is important that candidates understand the need to define all of the words within a term when asked 'what is meant by' or 'give a definition'.

**Question 5.2**

Answers to this question were varied with only a minority receiving full marks. The main issue was students choosing factors that were not mentioned in the article, such as group size or expertise. This was one of a number of examples within this paper that suggests students were not reading the stimulus materials as carefully as they needed to. This is an important skill and it is one that students are likely to benefit from practising.

**Question 5.3**

The answers to this question suggested that students are not clear on which factors are social and which are dispositional. Other reasons for marks being limited was that a factor was outlined without any example being used. The most effective answers illustrated how the chosen dispositional factor (such as personality or morality) would affect a specific group activity (such as 'not joining in with a group taking part in a riot'). Almost half of students received at least 1 mark for their answers to this question.

**Section B: Language, Thought and Communication****Question 7**

Although some students answered this question very well, many gave evaluations that were considered to be limited or muddled. One reason for this was confusion about the details of research carried out with various ethnic groups. Some students just described the hypothesis rather than evaluating it. Good answers often explained how the link between language and intelligence levels supports the hypothesis.

**Question 8.1**

Given that GCSE Psychology students had not previously had the experience of answering 9-mark questions, it was pleasing to see that almost half gave answers at level 2 or level 3. It was, however, unusual to see answers that gained full marks. Although knowledge of the study was generally good there was some confusion over the details of the different dances. Another relatively common point of confusion was the food source provided for the bees, with a number of answers stating that this was honey rather than sugar water. Evaluations varied greatly, from answers that gave excellent detail on 4 or 5 different points to those who only offered confused, generic or irrelevant points.

It was common for there to be many more details provided than was necessary for the available marks to be awarded. This was especially the case with the method. It was not uncommon to see additional pages containing most of an extra A4 page for this answer. This was also the case for the 6 mark 'Describe and evaluate' question (12) and the 9 mark synoptic question (19). The space provided within the exam paper is generally a good guide to how much detail is needed in order to gain full marks.

**Question 8.2**

This question was not answered very well with less than a quarter being awarded any marks at all. It appeared that the term 'alternative hypothesis' was misinterpreted as being a different hypothesis. This resulted in many students either giving a null hypothesis or attempting to use different independent or dependent variables. Another common reason for no credit being received for this question was that the answers provided were conclusions or aims.

**Question 8.3**

This question was generally answered well, with the vast majority gaining at least 1 mark. While quantitative data was often defined accurately, qualitative data tended to be dealt with less accurately. Although 'in the form of words' was accepted, 'written' was not. This is because numbers are also written. The example of quantitative data had to relate to the bee study in some way but it was not uncommon for students to give a general or unrelated example.

**Question 9.1**

This question was generally answered well with three-quarters of students referring to at least one relevant factor such as age, culture or gender. There appeared to be some misunderstanding regarding the concept of personal space, as some students gave answers such as 'size of room' or 'amount of people around you'. Because personal space is a preference, it doesn't change when we have less of it than we would like.

**Question 9.2**

Almost half of students achieved full marks on this question and displayed excellent knowledge of a factor affecting personal space. The most popular example featured the different personal space sizes for 'Arab' and 'English' cultures. There were also a number of other cultures offered in a similar way – some of which were more creditworthy than others. One of the main reasons for answers being considered to be limited or muddled was that a factor was outlined without any example being used.

**Section C: Brain and Neuropsychology****Question 10**

More than half of students achieved full marks on this question and the majority received at least 2 marks. One of the most common errors came from having the answers the wrong way round. It was also not uncommon for 'sweating' to be given as a function of the somatic nervous system.

**Questions 11.1 and 11.2**

These questions were generally answered well with the vast majority of students getting full marks. Where wrong answers were given for 11.1, the calculations were generally wrong as well.

**Question 11.4**

Although some students answered this question very well, only a third gave level 2 answers. One issue was merely identifying the changes in heart rate shown in the stem, without any link to the flight or fight response. Other answers showed good knowledge of the fight-or-flight response but did not link it to the heart rates shown in the table or the roller coaster ride.

**Question 12**

Despite previous AQA GCSE Psychology exam papers often having 6 mark 'Describe and evaluate' questions in them, students found it difficult to get into the top level on this question. A very small minority gave answers at level 3 and almost half gave level 1 answers. A fifth of students did not attempt this question at all. This may be reflective of the nature of this particular

theory and topic area. In general, more marks were gained for the description than for the evaluation. This was partly due to the number of answers that did not provide any evaluation at all. Good answers were often more detailed than they needed to be for the available marks and were often more in line with the requirements of a 9 mark answer. There also appeared to be some lack of clarity as to what the brain being referred to as 'plastic' actually means.

### **Question 13**

Very few students received a mark for this question and a similar number did not attempt it at all. Very few answers gave the connection between mental processes and brain activity/structures – they more often just referred to as it being a scientific way of studying the brain.

### **Question 14.1**

Well over half of answers gained at least 1 mark for this question with a fifth gaining full marks. The most frequent issues were the incorrect lobe being identified or giving an explanation of what was happening in the brain (such as 'damage to the opposite lobe') rather than a possible cause of the damage. From those students who did give a possible cause, 'stroke' was the most common answer.

### **Question 14.2**

Almost all students offered a correct scanning technique with the significant majority being awarded at least 1 mark for this question. The most common issue in identifying a scanning technique was confusing 'CBT' with a CAT scan. The command word 'justify' was not always addressed very well, with many answers being more descriptive. Good answers not only offered specific ways in which the damage/blood clot/stroke would be revealed using the scanning technique they had identified but also identified positive features - such as 'uses less radiation' or 'a non-invasive technique'.

## **Section D: Psychological Problems**

### **Questions 15.1 and 15.2**

These multiple-choice questions proved to be more of a challenge for students than previous multiple-choice type questions with only half gaining the marks for each one. This may be a result of research methods now being examined within all topic areas and of the move towards making multiple-choice type questions a greater test of knowledge and understanding.

### **Question 16.1**

Less than a fifth of students received a mark for this question. The most common issue was giving an example of a symptom of a mental health problem (e.g. 'low mood'). Other answers offered a more general comment about how mental health could be assessed (e.g. 'by studying a person's relationships').

### **Question 16.2**

Although some students answered this question very well, only a third gave level 2 answers. One common issue was students confusing the effects of significant mental health issues with the possible effects of social media. Another common issue was providing lots of knowledge, but forgetting to refer to the article. Some students wrote a lot about effects on the individual issues but

nothing about the effects on society. Good answers tended to reference the article first and then expand on this with psychological knowledge.

### **Question 17.1**

This question was answered well with the significant majority of students receiving the available mark. The most common responses were CBT or anti-depressant medication. A number of students suggested that aversion therapy was an appropriate treatment for depression. Unfortunately this meant that they did not receive any marks for both 17.1 and 17.2.

### **Question 17.2**

Although some students answered this question very well, only a third gave level 2 answers. One common issue was describing the identified therapy/intervention rather than evaluating it. Some students gave muddled answers about CBT that seemed to fit more appropriately with counselling - such as saying that you can freely talk about all of your feelings and emotions. Good answers made relevant points about the effectiveness of a therapy, research support, positive effects and side-effects.

### **Question 18**

Nearly all students received at least 1 mark for this question with more than a third receiving at least half of the 4 available marks. Most students gave an appropriate question although some did not make a clear link to harmful substances or addiction. The most commonly identified ethical issues were 'right to withdraw' and 'confidentiality/anonymity'. A common reason as to why full marks were not awarded was that answers explained the reason why it was important to deal with the identified issue, rather than how to go about actually dealing with it.

### **Question 19**

Given that AQA GCSE Psychology students had not previously had the experience of answering synoptic questions; it was perhaps not entirely surprising that a tiny minority gave answers at level 3. About a tenth of the students did not attempt this answer at all and the vast majority of answers scored 2 marks or less. Students seemed to become muddled as they tried to explain peer influence and conformity together. Often, they explained peer pressure rather than peer influence. Knowledge of conformity was stronger than knowledge of peer influence, despite this being the area of the specification linked specifically to addiction. Another reason for the low marks was the difficulty some students seemed to have gaining AO3 marks with the command term not being 'evaluate'. Stronger answers were able to 'discuss' rather than simply describe their knowledge of the topic area but this was generally not the case. There was often a lot of repetition and a general lack of clarity, not necessarily seen in other answers.



### **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.