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Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

October 2017

Pearson Edexcel International GCE
In Psychology (WPS04)
Paper 4 Clinical Psychology and
Psychological Skills

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General Comments

There were limited entries for this October series, however of those seen most candidates attempted all elements of this paper with few questions left blank, demonstrating good skills in examination timing. Candidate responses demonstrated some good knowledge and understanding across clinical psychology and in psychological skills.

Candidates showed good understanding in terms of symptoms and features of their chosen mental health disorder and Rosenhan's (1973) study.

Difficulties seen tended to be in the mathematical skills and the long answer questions in both clinical psychology and the psychological skills section. Here, candidate responses were often limited to lower level mark bands as a result of a lack of developed AO3 material. Few justified their arguments and evaluations, little supporting evidence was seen and the content tended towards AO1 knowledge and understanding of the topic without the evaluation required.

Application for AO2 responses was an area that posed problems for most candidates. Where generic responses were given candidates did not achieve well, and it is recommended that candidates practice their application to stimulus material in order to demonstrate their ability to draw on their understanding of content and show how this would apply in a given context.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper candidates are offered the following advice:

- Candidates should clearly apply their understanding of psychology to the context in a given scenario, they should not just give a name or single word as this is insufficient as an application skill.
- Generic points should be avoided, candidates should be able to give specific responses that are clearly linked to the question content and taxonomy, for example when evaluating content such as ethics it should be explicit how the point made relates to the argument being presented.
- Candidates should be able to both calculate for mathematical skills and understand the rationale for mathematical decision making in psychology.
- Within their extended open responses, candidates should give balanced responses and exemplified points which lead to making informed conclusions or judgements (where appropriate to the taxonomy used) in relation to the question content.
- Where candidates are expanding their points, the use of evidence and supporting/contesting concepts could aid them in exemplifying their knowledge and understanding as appropriate.
- Candidates should review the taxonomy expectations within the specification to aid them in understanding the key requirements of the questions and the distinctions between these, for example the differences between describe and explain in shorter questions.

The remainder of this report will focus on specific questions from the examination.

Comments on Individual Questions

Sections A and B: Clinical Psychology

Q01a

Question Introduction

This was an AO1 question targeting knowledge and understanding. Candidates were expected to demonstrate their understanding of either unipolar depression or anorexia nervosa. Candidates produced many accurate responses and generally achieved well on this question. Where candidates did not achieve well, they often repeated symptoms/features or did not describe a symptom/feature in sufficient depth to clearly indicate it was a symptom of the disorder they had studied.

Q01b

Question Introduction

This was an AO1 knowledge and understanding about cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Candidates occasionally described what CBT is, rather than give the principles of CBT, such as rationalising faulty thinking or addressing negative thought patterns. Some responses were generic and applied to more than one possible therapy.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should be specific in their answers to clearly show their understanding of the topic being assessed in the questions.

Q02a

Question Introduction

This was an AO1 knowledge and understanding and AO3 justification/exemplification question requiring candidates to explain two strengths of the classic study by Rosenhan (1973). Most candidates were able to achieve AO1 here, and some points were well linked to Rosenhan (1973). Where some candidates did not achieve well this was often due to non-specific responses that could apply to multiple studies, or where the AO3 justification/exemplification contained basic statements such as 'strong generalisability' without development.

Examiner Tip

When giving strengths of a study, candidates should be clear that their points are specific to the study in the question, rather than non-specific points that could be applied to other studies in psychology.

Q02b

Question Introduction

This was an AO1 knowledge and understanding and AO3 justification/exemplification question requiring candidates to explain two weaknesses of the classic study by Rosenhan (1973). Some candidates confused who the participants were in the study, discussing the hospital staff as participants rather than the pseudo-patients as the participants.

Examiner Tip

When giving weaknesses of a study, candidates should be clear that their points are specific to the study in the question, rather than non-specific points that could be applied to other studies in psychology.

Q03a

Question Introduction

This was an AO2 application question requiring candidates to describe the methodology used in the scenario. A few candidates were unable to achieve marks for this question as a result of describing an inaccurate methodology.

Q03b

Question Introduction

This question was a mathematical AO2 skill requiring candidates to describe the level of measurement for the data Dr Ashton gathered. This question was not well answered, with candidates interpreting the data rather than giving a description of the correct level of measurement.

Q03c

Question Introduction

This was an AO2 mathematical question requiring candidates to plot and label a scatter diagram from the data they were provided with. Some candidates were unable to give a suitable title and some candidates did not label their scatter diagram, limiting their achievement in this question. Very few candidates incorrectly plotted the data.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should not connect the plots in a scatter diagram as this becomes a line diagram and does not answer the question. A line of best fit is acceptable, although it is not required.

Q03d

Question Introduction

This was an AO3 skill question that required candidates to draw a conclusion from the information they have been provided with. Many candidates achieved well here, although some candidates often stated or described the results rather than interpreting what the results showed to draw a conclusion.

Examiner Tip

A conclusion should be an interpretation of information rather than a statement or description of data.

Q04a

Question Introduction

Candidates were required to describe the procedure for their practical investigation in clinical psychology. The practical investigation is a content analysis that explores attitudes to mental health. Some students described the wrong practical investigation in their answer to this question. The candidates who addressed the correct practical often gave good descriptions which were clearly indicative of a strong understanding of what they had done themselves for their practical investigation. Where candidates did not achieve well it was often due to a non-specific and generic response.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should always ensure that they describe what they did in their practical investigation and not give a generic, non-specific description of the methodology.

Q04b

Question Introduction

Candidates were required to give the conclusion for their practical investigation in clinical psychology. The responses to this question were mixed. Candidates giving accurate conclusions were evidently very clear on their practical in clinical psychology, whereas candidates not achieving marks on this question demonstrated either a limited understanding of conclusions, or gave the wrong practical investigation.

Q04c

Question Introduction

This was an AO2 question requiring identification from the practical investigation and AO3 justification/exemplification question requiring candidates to give a weakness of their practical investigation. Where candidates could identify a weakness of their practical, this was done well, but often the AO3 was under developed and did not exemplify/justify why or how their identified point was a weakness.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should ensure that they give a weakness of their practical rather than a generic weakness of the methodology they used.

Q05a

Question Introduction

This was a mathematical calculation of the ratio. Some candidates were unable to calculate this correctly. The errors were often evident in their calculation process rather than their understanding of what a ratio is.

Q05b

Question Introduction

This was a mathematical calculation of a fraction. Some candidates were unable to calculate this correctly. The errors were often evident in their understanding of how to calculate and express a fraction.

Q06

Question Introduction

This question was an extended open response question for 16-marks assessed using the levels based marking criteria. The question required candidates to evaluate two biological explanations of schizophrenia, one of which was required to be neurotransmitters.

Some of the responses did not engage with the taxonomy of 'evaluate' and in these cases candidates often presented some knowledge and understanding of two biological explanations, with the most common second biological explanation being genetics, without addressing the purpose of the question.

Candidates evidently understood neurotransmitters to a greater depth than their alternative biological explanation. This resulted in some responses being imbalanced.

Where candidates have attempted evaluations in their responses, some have given evidence for and against the explanations, but this was not always well linked to the skills of evaluating and was often more of a statement or description of the findings of a study without connection to how or why this research is relevant within the evaluation.

Concluding points were not always evident, and many candidates presented their response without logical reasoning or understanding of competing arguments when attempting this question presented.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should present exemplified arguments and draw from a range of evidence or concepts to justify their points in extended essays. Logical chains of reasoning should be presented to show competing arguments and these should draw to conclusions or judgements based on the evidence utilised in the response and in answer to the question presented.

Sections C, D and E: Psychological Skills

Q07a

Question Introduction

This was an AO2 question requiring candidates to describe qualitative data in relation to psychological research. Many candidates did not describe qualitative data, instead giving strengths or weaknesses of this form of data, rather than a description of what this is in terms of psychological research. Some were unable to fully apply their responses and gave generic statements with no reference to how this could be used in psychological research. A few candidates gave a 'list' of methods associated with qualitative data, but did not sufficiently link these methods to qualitative data, limiting their achievement on this question.

Q07b

Question Introduction

This was an AO2 question requiring candidates to apply quantitative data to relevant psychological research. Some candidates were unable to fully apply their responses and gave generic statements with no reference to how this could be used in psychological research. A few candidates gave a 'list' of methods associated with quantitative data, but did not sufficiently link these methods to quantitative data, limiting their achievement on this question.

Q07c

Question Introduction

Candidates were required to define primary and secondary data to demonstrate AO1 knowledge and understanding. Most candidates were able to give an accurate response to this question.

Q07d

Question Introduction

This was an AO1 knowledge and understanding and AO3 exemplification/justification question that required candidates to explain one strength of secondary data. Many candidates were able to identify a strength of this form of data, but few were able to exemplify this to develop their response, often making brief statements such as 'more generalisable' without elaborating on this.

Q08a

Question Introduction

This question required candidates to give a directional (one-tailed) fully operationalised hypothesis for Jacob's research. Some students gave a non-directional hypothesis for this question, stating a 'difference' in recall. Some students did not operationalise the IV and/or DV for their hypothesis.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should fully operationalise an IV and a DV when asked to provide a hypothesis.

Q08b

Question Introduction

This was an AO2 application and AO3 justification and exemplification question requiring candidates to explain a sampling technique that could be used for the study Jacob is conducting. Most candidates were able to give a sampling method and exemplify this in relation to the study conducted by Jacob.

Q08c

Question Introduction

This question required candidates to explain how Jacob can ensure reliability and validity in his laboratory experiment, it is an AO2 application and AO3 exemplification/justification question for six marks. Overall, candidates were not always able to achieve high marks here. Many candidates gave generic responses about a laboratory method but failed to apply their points to the use of this method in the research of memory by Jacob. A few candidates did achieve well, and they were able to present key features that can increase the reliability and validity of Jacob's memory research.

Examiner Tip

Where a question directs a candidate to give a response in relation to a specified scenario, they should be explicit in presenting a response that discusses the question to demonstrate how well they can apply their underpinning knowledge and understanding to the scenario, in this case Jacob's study of memory.

Q08d

Question Introduction

This was an AO2 application question requiring candidates to state why Jacob's results may not be generalisable. Some students stated an appropriate answer, often with a focus on the lack of representativeness of the sample group. Where candidates did not achieve well, their response tended to be generic rather than applied to Jacob's study itself.

Q9

Question Introduction

This was a discuss AO1 knowledge and understanding and AO2 application question that required candidates to give an equal emphasis between their underpinning knowledge/understanding and an application to the context of the given key question in their answer. Candidates can approach this question using any relevant and accurate aspect of their psychology course content, many used maternal deprivation, and some developed their discussion with social learning theory.

Overall, candidates struggled to select appropriate theory/concepts/research relevant to the key question of whether day care is beneficial for a child's development. Most candidates were able to apply some of their understanding to the scenario. Some candidates discussed day care, but were limited in their ability to use their understanding from their studies across psychology topics to the novel context of the key question.

A few candidates did not discuss the key question presented, instead giving disjointed points that they did not link to whether day care was beneficial for a child's development.

Examiner Tip

Candidates must draw on the stimulus material given and make connections to relevant knowledge and understanding from across their studies. Candidates should avoid replicating the stimulus material word for word in an answer as this does not show their understanding or application of material to the novel context. The use of understanding from across the course should be evident in their discussions of the key question presented to them.

Q10

Question Introduction

This was an extended open response essay worth 20 marks that addresses a key issue and debate in psychology. The topic of content was the nature versus nurture debate. The question required candidates to demonstrate AO1 knowledge and understanding and AO3 evaluation points to assess whether nature plays a greater role in human behaviour than nurture.

Some candidates responded well to this question, although for the most part many candidates were unable to assess the debate and gave responses that were knowledge of nature and nurture as opposed to an assessment of which plays a greater role in human behaviour.

Most candidates found this question challenging, and their argument was presented as the strengths and weaknesses of nature, and strengths and weaknesses of nurture with no judgements of the content presented, thus missing the taxonomy skills for the assess taxonomy essay question.

There was some use of theory and research from across the course that showed AO1 understanding of nature and nurture examples, however very little of this evidence was used in the form of AO3 assessment to make judgements about where the research or theories were situated within the argument about the role of nature and nurture in human behaviour.

Some candidates gave a response that contained little or no assessment of the role of nature and nurture, instead giving a response showing a basic understanding of each concept without any development or assessment.

Examiner Tip

Extended open response questions of 20-marks in this section require candidates to draw on a range of content from across their studies of psychology. They should select the appropriate content in order to address the question being asked and it may be worth candidates practicing question techniques in order to ensure they are confident with strategies to respond to the specifics of a 20-mark question. Candidates do not need to include every element of content they have studied, but rather they should actively select what is an appropriate range of points and accurately utilise these for the specific direction of the question.

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