



**General Certificate of Education**

**Health and Social Care  
8621/8623/8626/8627/8629**

**HC21 Research Methods and Perspectives**

**Report on the Examination**

*June 2010*

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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## HC21 Research Methods and Perspectives

### Principal Moderator's Report

This unit continues to be a popular choice and the improvement in the quality of the submitted portfolios is a trend year on year.

Topic choices were more varied than in other years and more closely linked to genuine and current health and social care issues, which was very pleasing to see. Familiar Issues such as those related to sporting activities, exercise and diet and their impact on health and well-being were handled well. The emergence of more unusual topics such as satisfaction surveys of health facilities within maternity provisions and GP surgeries evidenced that centres are becoming more adventurous, confident, and practical in the areas explored. Some very interesting and pertinent issues were explored.

Another improvement is the move toward formal scientific report-writing as evidenced by a reduction in word count and tighter, more formalised scripts. A problem area remains the structuring of what should be the formal aims and/or hypotheses. Aims are wider in their scope than hypotheses and there should only ever be a single stated aim. Hypotheses are predictive and should be operationalised whenever possible and they must never be written in the form of a question. Some centres submitted reports with three or four aims or hypotheses, which gave the report too broad a scope leading to a general lack of focus. Topic areas must be chiselled into a manageable research aim that will allow candidates to generate an appropriate amount of primary data from which they will be able to draw one or two sensible conclusions.

A major improvement in many of this year's submissions was a strict adherence to a formal report structure and a shift away from the over-justification of the methodology or research design chosen and used. Candidates stated clearly and concisely why they chose a particular methodology without long, unnecessary accounts of the problems or virtues of every other method available. Finally, centres are producing tight, succinct reports.

Candidates generally used the appropriate level of technical language and closely followed the sections and subsections as stipulated in the specification for this unit.

Data collection was evidenced appropriately with a reduction in the number of centres including every questionnaire or piece of raw data generated by the research sample. The quality of the questionnaires was better than in previous years, as they contained pertinent questions with more measurable outcomes. It is better to have a few direct, relevant questions than lots of only loosely-connected nebulous questions. Less can equal more.

There was a marked improvement in the type and level of analysis performed on the raw data generated by the research. Candidates evidenced how the data was managed and collated by providing and using summary tables, which were appropriately referenced and parked in the appendix section. Accurate calculations of percentages, measures of central tendency and, in some cases, standard deviation were included as well as correlations supported by formulas and workings.

As in other years a continuing flaw or problem is that graphs are still not being given suitable titles and the axes not labelled accurately. Candidates often included graphs and charts but they were not always supported by appropriate commentary. A graph on its own tells the reader very little. It must be read in context. For instance, a graph showing a pictorial representation of service users' satisfaction of a maternity unit must include details of the actual number of responses and when and where the survey was carried out. Without such detail, percentages may be misleading.

The weakest part of the reports continues to be the discussion section. Candidates are still failing to provide comprehensive and thorough discussions of the research findings. Some conclusions are drawn, but rarely are the implications or anomalies in the findings explored fully. General limitations are discussed, but in a generic fashion such as a list of bullet points. The discussion section is a product of everything that has gone before and it should include linkage between the background research and the new data or findings. Candidates should be

encouraged to consider the theoretical and ethical issues associated with their research as well as methodological problems.

More candidates did attempt to explore the relevance and importance of attending to both reliability and validity when considering their research design and output, which signifies an increase in sophistication, and an understanding of what constitutes 'good' research.

Candidates should use full Harvard referencing, but this level of rigour is not mandatory.

Nevertheless, reports must be referenced and all sources acknowledged.

Overall, reports generated by candidates show an improvement on other years. Centres are to be commended on their adherence to the specification and the widening scope of the topics explored.

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