



**General Certificate of Education (A-level) Applied
June 2011**

Health and Social Care

HC21

**(Specification
8621/8623/8626/8627/8629)**

Unit 21: Research Methods and Perspectives

Report on the Examination

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HC21 Research Methods and Perspectives
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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.

It was pleasing to see an increasingly diverse and interesting range of topic choices. A lot of candidates still opted for diet-related issues, but questions around Jamie Oliver (and his impact on healthy eating), seems to have disappeared. Interesting choices included physical measures and cognitive related disorders. A greater variety of methodologies seemed to be emerging with correlations being the second most popular choice after questionnaires. A few candidates used a case study approach and it was pleasing to moderate one centre, which used content analysis. Social surveys are useful tools for collecting data, but they can be time-consuming, cumbersome and tedious to analyse. Having to analyse up to 30 questions can lead to mistakes.

A continuing trend of improvement is the adherence to the AQA specification requirement for formal scientific report-writing. The layout of the reports conformed to a formal structure with an appropriate title, sections and subheadings. Centres do seem to have received the message that a short, concise report is better than a bulky over-explained piece of work. Formulating aims and hypotheses is still proving difficult. Aims are broad, general statements of intent they can be in the form of a question. Hypotheses are predictive and should be operationalised (given a measure) whenever possible, they must never be written in the form of a question. A common mistake was candidates producing 2 or 3 hypotheses, which meant they have to gather lots of different data to test their predictions. One hypothesis is enough, and no extra marks are obtained by including more. The hypothesis, data and analysis should be simple, thereby providing less room for errors.

Candidates used a variety of question types and there was an increase in the use of qualitative data. Common errors still include: irrelevant, double, ambiguous or leading questions. Teachers need to be vigilant in their overseeing of the writing of the questionnaires as these sorts of mistakes are easily rectified.

Analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data was well-executed and candidates appear to be gaining confidence in this area, calculating percentages, measures of central tendency and correlations. A few centres included inferential statistics, which is acceptable, but if a calculation is performed it is necessary to show the minute workings. Descriptive statistics were evidenced well but as in previous years a continuing flaw is that graphs are still not been given suitable titles and the axes not being labelled accurately. A lot of candidates are using 'Excel' to generate their graphs and do not know how to use the labelling facility. It might be sensible to stick with hand-drawn graphs which do at least provide evidence of understanding.

The weakest part of the reports continues to be the discussion section, but there was a marked improvement on other years. Candidates made attempts to point out limitations in their research methodologies but the analysis or explanation of their impact was minimal. A recurring example is when candidates simply state that too few participants were included. This needs to be followed up with a consequence in this case that the sample is not representative so the results cannot be generalised to other people or situations. The importance of testing for reliability and validity was acknowledged by some of the more-able candidates, which is always good practice. Many candidates mentioned ethical issues, but only briefly.

Candidates should use full Harvard referencing, but this level of rigour is not mandatory. In-text citations are becoming more common, supported by full referencing or bibliographies at the end, which is good practice. The use of Internet sources seems to be declining which is a positive move as it lends itself so easily to the inclusion of generic materials and ‘cut and paste’.

Overall reports show an improvement on previous years.

Grade boundaries

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