Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International GCE

In Psychology (WPS02) Paper 1

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1) This question seemed to be equally split between McDermott (2008) and Hoefelmann et al. (2006). There were very few candidates who wrote about the incorrect study.
The aim tended to be answered fairly well, with most candidates able to accurately state the aim of their chosen study.
The results at times lacked detail. Candidates are reminded to check the marks given for each question as this indicates how much should be written. Those candidates who wrote about the results from Hoefelmann et al. sometimes were confused about the results and what they showed.
The improvement required candidates to identify an improvement and then justify they improvement. Some candidates identified generic improvements that could be applied to several different studies. Those that did accurately identify on improvement sometimes failed to justify why it was an improvement, instead they focussed on a weakness of the original study.
Candidates should ensure that any suggested improvement clearly links to the chosen study.

2a) This question required candidates to engage with the stimulus material to gain AO2 marks. Quite a few candidates failed to link all part of their answers to the stimulus material, often giving generic answers about how twin studies could be carried out, so failed to gain all the marks available. Good answers fully engaged with the stimulus material and focussed on how Vanessa could use twin studies to investigate genetic relatedness and aggression. Some candidates used their knowledge of Bregden et al's. study and adapted it to the context of Vanessa, and so gained marks.

2b) Some answers did not explain a weakness of twin studies, but gave description of how twin studies could be carried out. Some answers stated that twin studies could not determine if something was genetically related or environmental but did not state why this may be the case so was not creditworthy as the aim of twin studies is to determine if a characteristic is due to nature or nurture. The most common answer given as a weakness was that it was hard to get a representative sample of twins, but only the better answers went on to justify or exemplify this point.

3a) Answers often failed to gain full marks for this question as there was a lack of detail in them, with a lot of answers often just giving one descriptive point about why Kylie experiences seasonal affective disorder. There was often a failure to engage with the stimulus given.
Candidates must do more than repeat the name from a stimulus to gain AO2 marks.

3b) Those answers that failed to gain both marks could often identify the fact that light therapy increases melatonin and so reduces sleepiness, but did not go on to justify or exemplify this point. Weaker answers failed to gain any credit as they often just said it was effective with no identification about why light therapy is effective.

3c) The most common alternative therapy was they use of anti-depressants. Answers often failed to clearly identify the alternative therapy when explaining the difference and so could not gain credit. Some answers stated that light therapy had no side effects, when it can have side effects. Those answers that scored 1 mark were able to identify a difference between light therapy and another, identifiable, therapy, but they failed to give any exemplification or justification in the answer.

4a) Most candidates gained the mark for a correct estimation.

4b) The answers that gained both marks could correctly define all aspects of the equation. Some answers scored 1 mark as they gave a partial definition, often not stating that it was equal or less than... The most common error in those answers that attempted they question but scored 0 was that they stated it was the probability the results were significant, rather than the probability the results were due to chance.

4c) The most common difference was that primary data is collected first hand and secondary data is already existing data. A lot of answer only gave one difference so limiting the marks they could be credited.
Candidates are advised to read questions carefully.

4d) Good answers were able to accurately identify why cause and effect is an issue with correlations and then go on to justify and exemplify their point. The most common answer was focussed on the fact they only look for a relationship. Weaker answers repeated what was in the stem of the question, stating that cause and effect is an issue with correlations, but not identifying why this may be.

5) Better answers were able to offer accurate and thorough knowledge and understanding about the role of hormones in aggression, as well as engage with the command word 'Assess' in their AO3 offering judgements based on logical well developed chains of reasoning.
Weaker answers often showed limited knowledge and understanding, often not going beyond naming hormones that can explain aggression. There was little knowledge about how they can explain aggression. The answers that had weaker AO3 often failed to engage with 'Assess how far...' and often gave an evaluate answer rather than an assess answer. This lead to a lack of any assessment or judgement.
Candidates would benefit from knowing the different command words, and what is expected in an answer for the different command words, especially for essays.

6a) This question required answers to engage with the stimulus material about a fear of bread. Compared to other answers that require AO2 answers did seem to engage with the stimulus material better. Weaker answers just focussed on the process of moving up the hierarchy of needs, and did not describe any other points about systematic desensitisation.

6b) The best answers were able to accurately identify a strength and weakness and then go on to exemplify or justify their answer. A lot of answers failed to offer any exemplification or justification so not addressing the AO3 elements of the question. It was nice to see answers using evidence from research studies, however some answers failed to use this evidence effectively.

7a) A lot of answers failed to engage with the stimulus material, which was required for this question as it targeted AO2. There were a lot of generic answers about observations. There was a lack of understanding of what is meant by the term event sampling in some of the answers, with some answers stating that Yoko would go to an event at the park.

7b) A lot of candidates attempted this mathematical skill question with a lot getting the correct answer, and rounding their final answer up to two decimal places as the question stated. Sometimes the minus sign was missing, and sometimes errors were made when rounding the numbers up before the final answer which meant the answer was incorrect.

7c) Answers who gained the mark were able to give an accurate definition of qualitative data. Some answers stated that it was words, but this does not distinguish qualitative data from quantitative data that is nominal as this can also be in the form of words.

8a) Most answers focused on the observation from the learning theories and developmental psychology section. The best answers focussed on the results, rather than how the results were collected, and were able to give detailed information about the results they collected. Some answers were about questionnaires rather than observations.

8b) A lot of answers to this question gave generic strengths that could be applied to any of their practicals, with the most common answers being about the sample.
When asked about a specific practical candidates should ensure their answer is applied to that practical.

8c) Again a lot of answers were generic improvements that could be applied to any of the practical carried out over the course. The best answers were able to identify an improvement that was specific to their observation and then go on to justify or exemplify their improvement. Of the answers that did well in this question the most common improvement was related to the definitions of behaviour or the number of observers.

9) A lot of answers did not focus on case studies as a research method. Instead they often focused on a case study, usually Little Hans, and so showed limited knowledge and understanding of case studies as a research method. This also impacted on the AO3 points as the answers would focus on evaluation of Little Hans rather than the research method.
Some answers focussed on Freud's theory.
Candidates should read the question carefully in order to answer the question that is asked.

10) Good answers were able to offer accurate and through knowledge of operant conditioning. However, there were some answers that were not accurate, often confusing negative reinforcement and punishment. Those answers that showed limited knowledge and understanding often gave the term used in operant conditioning but offered nothing else.
Those who engaged with the question often gave well developed logical arguments about the extent operant conditioning could explain human behaviour, often offering judgements throughout the essay. Weaker answers failed to focus on the command word 'to what extent'... and gave a general evaluation of operant conditioning without any judgement about the extent it can explain human behaviour.

11) The best answers showed an impressive coherence to considering both social learning theory and brain functioning as explanations of Hugo's aggression. They were able to show accurate and thorough knowledge of both explanation, and offer sustained application to the scenario. They also demonstrated well-developed and logical evaluations of both theories presenting a balanced conclusion. Some answers showed better development for social learning theory compared to brain functioning.
Weaker answers may have shown limited knowledge and understanding, often just naming the terms used in social learning theory or the areas of the brain that may affect aggression. The AO3 may not have been developed.