Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

October 2019

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Subsidiary In Psychology (WPS01) Paper 1: Social and Cognitive Psychology

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General Comments

This paper covered a range of question types allowing candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. There were several blank responses this series, in particular with questions about social practical and the contemporary study in detail. There was no clear evidence of using a questionnaire showed through in the answers and only a few candidates reported on the details of the sample/result of their contemporary study. Both of these topics are key parts of the specification. This suggests that the candidates need to develop a greater awareness both of exam skills and timing under exam conditions.

The mathematical assessment questions were generally answered well but candidates must ensure that they read the instructions carefully and provide the answer in the form requested. Generic responses still pose a problem for candidates, this is apparent in questions with scenarios. Candidates must be encouraged to apply their knowledge and understanding to the scenario.

A few candidates demonstrated a high level of psychological knowledge and frequently gained credit for the identification or knowledge mark, but many were unable to provide clear explanations of core concepts such as risk assessment and levels of significance. Understanding was equal across the Social and Cognitive topics. As in previous series, candidates would find it helpful to analyse the different command terms and recognise how they should approach certain type of question.

The essay questions were approached confidently and showed some awareness of psychological knowledge and understanding. Only a very few candidates were confident with justification of evidence and offering an explanation which could be used as part of a balanced conclusion.

Paper Summary

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

Candidates should ensure that they apply their knowledge and understanding clearly to a given scenario.

Candidates should use supporting evidence or more fully developed justification points within their responses.

Candidates must analyse the command terms so that they have a clear awareness of the type of response required.

Candidates must learn studies thoroughly so that they can incorporate accurate details into their answers.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Question 1a

Question Introduction

This was an AO1 knowledge and understanding question with two marks for a description of the agentic state. Most candidates had a superficial idea of this concept. The most frequent response was to say that a person acts as an agent to an authority figure. A stronger response linked this to carrying out orders. Many candidates noted that the authority figure took the responsibility. This allowed for the credit of one mark.

Question 1b

Question Introduction

This was an AO1 identification and an AO3 justification/exemplification question. The candidates were required to give two strengths of agency theory. A popular answer involved applications of the agency theory in society, such as the Holocaust. Some candidates went on to elaborate and justified this by saying that the soldiers obeyed Hitler and other authority figures. Most candidates tried to show how the agency theory was supported by Milgram. This was vague and a surprisingly high number of responses included vague or incorrect statements. Some candidates included a weakness and many answers were undeveloped.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should show how the point identified as a strength is a strength of that particular theory.

Question 2

Question Introduction

There were two AO1 knowledge and understanding marks for an accurate description of each risk management consideration and two A03 marks for justification of each of the considerations. The responses received were usually about ethical issues only and did not include risk management. Candidates did not assess the potential harm to a participant. Some responses managed to give one risk management consideration but failed to develop it for A03. Most answers were generic and concerned general ethics and thus gained no credit

Question 3a

Question Introduction

There were two A02 marks for an accurate description of a control from the candidates own social practical investigation. This was a low scoring question for a variety of reasons. Some candidates discussed their cognitive practical instead of the social investigation but most responses were generic, such as it was carried out in the classroom with other participants. This comment could have applied to almost any investigation. The social practical investigation should involve a questionnaire and this must be clear in the answers for Question 3. Occasionally a specific variable was mentioned but not clearly described and not linked to a social questionnaire.

Question 3b

Question Introduction

This question was low scoring for the many of the same reasons as 3a. In this question there was an A02 mark for identification of an improvement to the sample of the social practical and an A03 mark for justification of each improvement. Most responses were generic and could have applied to any practical investigation. Candidates did not make clear reference to their own studies. The popular improvements were to suggest a bigger sample or random sampling but neither were justified. In several cases it was a criticism of their sample rather than an improvement suggested.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should make an improvement very clear and relevant to the study.

Question 3c

Question Introduction

An AO2 mark was available for a weakness of gathering qualitative data and an AO3 mark for justification of that weakness which had to be linked to the social practical investigation carried out by the candidates. Responses were largely generic and did not have any apparent relevance to the practical investigation or even a questionnaire.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should use specific points from their investigations to answer the questions.

Question 4

Question Introduction

This is a levels- based question testing AO1 knowledge and understanding and AO3 justification/exemplification with equal emphasis. The candidates were required to evaluate Asch's research into conformity. This task was approached confidently by most candidates and they were able to describe the experiments in detail even including the vision test at the start and accurate figures in the results. The evaluation points were on occasion quite limited and did not develop logical chains of reasoning to explain the A01 point fully. A few candidates only gave evaluation points and did not provide the underlying description of the research. In a very few responses, the candidates had described Moscovici's work instead. There were a significant number of candidates who had good knowledge and were able to achieve Level 3 and 4 on this question.

Cognitive Psychology

Question 5a

Question Introduction

There are two AO1 knowledge and understanding marks awarded for describing the sample of either of the two Contemporary studies. Most candidates identified Sacchi as the contemporary study they had studied. Very few were able to describe the sample for 2 marks, although many were able to give the number of 187 students and perhaps the breakdown of male and female students for 1 mark. There was some confusion between study 1 and study 2 for Sacchi and many vague responses which stated that it was a volunteer sample or Italian students without any further elaboration. Some candidates did not attempt this question at all. Darling was only attempted by a handful of candidates and there was limited knowledge demonstrated.

Question 5b

Question Introduction

There are two AO1 knowledge and understanding marks for an accurate description of the results of the Contemporary study. Even the candidates that had identified Darling in Question 5a did not know the results. Any attempts were muddled and hard to follow. Similarly, for Sacchi the results were vague and figures were rarely used to give an accurate description. This question was left blank in many papers.

Question 5c

Question Introduction

There is an A01 mark and an A03 mark for each weakness from Darling or Sacchi. Most answers provided a generic weakness which could be applied to many studies, such as 'it lacked ecological validity' or a comment about the sample. Demand characteristics was another popular response. The weaknesses were often so similar that they could not be counted as two separate weaknesses. In keeping with the rest of Question 5, this section was often not attempted by the candidate.

Examiner Tip

Candidates must focus on learning all parts of their key studies

Question 6a

Question Introduction

There were two A02 marks for a simple calculation of the mean of each condition. Whilst the calculation itself did not cause any problems and most candidates achieved the correct answers, not all candidates expressed the answer to one significant figure as directed.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should follow the instructions carefully and look at the number of significant figures required.

Question 6b

Question Introduction

There are two AO2 application marks for this question. Many candidates left this question blank. Some candidates were able to express the meaning of p but failed to link it to Cha and Dao's investigation in any way so could not achieve marks. Most answers were muddled and showed that candidates were unclear about levels of significance. Some responses described the calculated value being less than the critical value but did not use this information to answer the question. There was little engagement with the scenario.

Question 6c

Question Introduction

This question has an A02 mark for application and an A03 justification mark. This was a low scoring question which was not attempted by all candidates. Very few candidates knew what was meant by a 'sense check' and these candidates could not express their answer clearly. There was a complete lack of understanding about this concept.

Question 6d

Question Introduction

There was an AO2 application mark and an AO3 justification mark for each strength and weakness in this question. Candidates did know the strengths and weaknesses of a repeated measures design but very few applied it to Cha and Dao's investigation. Attempts at application usually involved mentioning the researchers' names only without engaging with the experiment itself. Most answers were generic and did not attain marks.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should link points back to the context in the scenario

Question 7

Question Introduction

This question was an 8 mark open response question which was assessed using the levels based marking criteria. The candidate was expected to discuss how reconstructive memory would explain the children's answers in the scenario. There were 4 A01 and 4 A02 marks available. Knowledge of reconstructive memory was limited although several candidates had a good knowledge of schema. Some attempted to use 'War of the Ghosts' to show how memory could be distorted but their account often resulted in an evaluation of that study. Most candidates recognised that they should use the information form the scenario but few managed to do this effectively. Often the response just repeated the information in the stem of the question and did not link it back to the A01 points that had been made. Some candidates attempted to develop their responses by taking each child separately and discussing their experience; unfortunately, this was often repetitive and not used to show the different aspects of reconstructive memory. This was disappointing as this question gave plenty of opportunities to do this and to develop a well- balanced and logical discussion. Most candidates did not show any awareness of competing arguments within their account and did not integrate the A01 and A02 points effectively

Examiner Tip

Candidates should look at the command term in a question carefully

Section C

Question 8

Question Introduction

This question was a 12-mark open response question which was assessed using the levels- based marking criteria. It is important to note that there is an AO1/AO2 and AO3 response required. Thus candidates were expected to give equal emphasis to knowledge and understanding, application to the context and justification in this answer. Candidates can approach this type of question in different ways.

Candidates interpreted this question in different ways. Often responses used conformity and compliance as the basis for the A01 marks. Sometimes candidates used the idea of social power theory to gain A01 marks. The references to the scenario were clear and well considered. Candidates tended to use the whole of the scenario which was encouraging. Some candidates did include some evaluation points but this was less frequent. Moscovici and Nemeth were quoted effectively in a few responses. Occasionally but infrequently there was some elaboration of these evaluation points which linked back to the scenario. Candidates who managed to combine knowledge, application and justification successfully did achieve the higher marking levels. The knowledge was supported through relevant evidence which was clearly linked and made relevant to the scenario. Some candidates managed a logical chain of reasoning and were able to show awareness of the significance of their arguments

Examiner Tip

Candidates should include more AO3 points in the longer essay questions.