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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Subsidiary In Psychology (WPS01)

Paper 1: Social and Cognitive Psychology

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General Comments

This paper went very smoothly and allowed candidates many opportunities to show their psychological skills. All questions on the paper were attempted in most cases. There were very few blank responses indicating that candidates approached this paper confidently and were able to complete it in the time available.

Questions involving studies in detail were not answered in the depth expected and it appeared as if candidates were not sure of the details for these studies. Whilst the essay questions showed some general knowledge and understanding of psychological processes, there seemed to be some confusion with the command term as the required details of the studies were not presented. Very few candidates were able to justify evidence clearly or in a way that could form part of a balanced conclusion.

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. Incomplete answers to questions involving strengths and weaknesses are often one of the main reasons for not gaining credit. Candidates did not link their responses specifically to the study or theory being evaluated. It was not always evident why a feature was considered as a strength or weakness. In some cases, especially reconstructive memory, candidates were unable to separate Bartlett's war of the ghosts study and his reconstructive memory theory.

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.

Paper Summary

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

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.

Candidates should take careful note of the mark allocation to judge the required depth of a response.

Candidates should develop AO3 points to provide logical chains of reasoning in the longer essay questions

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Question 1 (a)

This was an AO1 knowledge and understanding question with two marks for a correct identification of two types of power. Most candidates had a good knowledge of the powers mentioned in the social power theory and were able to identify them clearly. There were a few incorrect answers, in particular, reward power was a popular answer.

Question 1 (b)

This was an AO1 identification for each strength and weakness and also an AO3 justification/exemplification for each response. The candidates were required to give a strength and a weakness of social power theory. A popular answer was that it showed why people obey but candidates did not link this specifically to the type of power being used or more directly to the theory. The strengths and weaknesses were badly expressed so that the responses did not always identify as a strength or a weakness. Some candidates muddled the responses with agency theory. Candidates must know the features of a theory so that they can give appropriate evaluation. Very few candidates achieved full marks in this question

Examiner Tip

Candidates should learn the features of a theory clearly.

Question 2 (a)

There is one AO2 application mark for the calculation of a percentage. This was a simple calculation and most candidates gained the mark. A few candidates gave the wrong part of the calculation 25% instead of 75%

Question 2 (b)

There were three AO2 application marks here for an appropriate description of gathering qualitative data. Most candidates could identify that the interviewers should use an interview or a questionnaire with open questions. Many went on to give appropriate examples of open questions which also gained credit. Very few candidates completed the account to elaborate these ideas or state how the researcher recorded the data and thus missed the third mark. Candidates did relate their answers to the scenario effectively.

Question 2 (c)

The question asked about individual differences. There were two AO2 marks for identification of each individual difference and two AO3 for justification of the chosen features. Many candidates ignored this and gave very general answers such as the students were tired. Others linked their responses to the idea of an authority figure which did not really answer the question being asked. Consequently, there were very few full mark answers. Interesting responses included the use of culture, or an authoritarian personality. Locus of control was also a popular response although these were mixed responses as candidates were unclear and muddled the response from an external or internal locus.

Question 3 (a)

There was one AO1 mark for an accurate description of primary data. Candidates had a working knowledge of primary data and most achieved the mark. There was a clear awareness of the idea of data being collected first-hand. The more detailed answers made it clear that it was collected by the researcher themselves through their own research.

Question 3 (b)

In this question there were three AO2 marks available for an accurate description of how Molly achieved a stratified sample. Most candidates achieved the initial mark as they were aware that Molly needed to decide on the different sub-groups she would use. Candidates referred to the scenario and often made sensible comments about the employees. At this point many candidates thought that the groups could then be represented equally, some candidates recognised that a percentage would need to be calculated but very few made the link that each subgroup would be represented in the sample in proportion to the target population. Candidates should look carefully at the mark allocation for a question to judge the depth of detail required in their own response.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should take careful note of the mark allocation to judge how much they elaborate their answers.

Question 4

This is a levels-based question testing AO1 knowledge and understanding and AO3 justification/exemplification with equal emphasis. The candidates were asked to evaluate Moscovici's study. As this is the classic study in the social part of the specification it is expected that candidates will be fully conversant with the details and answer this question confidently. This is a very straightforward question. Many candidates only gave evaluation points and did not provide the underlying description of the research. This is a common mistake in 'evaluate' questions and candidates should ensure they know the various command terms. Some candidates did know the study itself and outlined some good descriptive points. These were often not developed fully to provide logical chains of reasoning limiting many responses to Level 2. Some candidates were able to achieve Level 3 but disappointingly very few achieved a Level 4 on this question.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should make sure that they know the meaning of each command term

Cognitive Psychology

Question 5 (a)

There are two AO1 knowledge and understanding marks awarded for describing the meaning of the term schema. This question was attempted by most candidates and many achieved full marks. Candidates had a clear understanding of the concept. There were several imaginative responses and examples were used cleverly to enhance the answer and achieve the second marking point.

Question 5 (b)

There is an AO1 mark and an AO3 mark for each strength and weakness of Reconstructive memory theory. Although most candidates attempted this question, it was not answered confidently. Many responses considered Bartlett's War of the Ghosts study rather than the theory and the strengths and weaknesses outlined related solely to that study. Some candidates used 'War of the Ghosts' as support for Bartlett's study but then continued to describe it as a weakness. The most popular weakness identified was that the theory does not explain how reconstruction occurs in the memory but this comment was under developed and not explained clearly enough to gain credit. Generally, answers in response to this question were unclear or confused.

Examiner Tip

Candidates must be able to distinguish between theories and studies clearly

Question 6 (a)

There was one A02 mark for identifying a fully operationalised independent variable. Most candidates wrongly identified the IV and described the DV instead. The candidates who realised that the memory game was the basis of the IV did not clearly distinguish the two conditions of the IV and focused on the number of words recorded instead. A few candidates managed to achieve the mark here.

Question 6 (b)

There are four A02 application marks for this maths question. A few candidates left this question blank or only attempted the first column. Candidates should familiarise themselves with calculations. There was some confusion about the minus sign and how and if it should be used. This prevented some candidates from completing the table correctly. Many candidates achieved all four marks.

Question 6 (c)

This question has two A02 marks for application. Candidates are expected to describe a control that has some relevance to the word lists. Responses were varied and many were not relevant to the scenario. Descriptions were often weak and so only a few candidates achieved both marks.

Question 6 (d)

There was an A01 knowledge and understanding question. A simple definition of randomisation was required. Many candidates conveyed that there was no specific order to the words whilst others went on to explain the element of chance in a random process. Although there was just enough detail to achieve the mark, candidates did not appear confident with the idea.

Question 7 (a)

This question has one AO2 mark for an accurate statement of the aim of the practical investigation carried out for the cognitive approach. The specification clearly states that this practical should be a laboratory experiment using a repeated measures design which gathers quantitative data. Some candidates made it clear in their aim that they had an independent measures design as they were looking at the recall of males and females or different age groups. Some responses were obviously related to the social practical instead. Most responses did identify a suitable aim for a cognitive practical.

Question 7 (b)

In this part of the question there were three AO2 marks available for an accurate description of the procedure of the cognitive practical. It was apparent that several centres had conducted inappropriate practical investigations using vulnerable groups of people. These were not in accordance with the ethical guidelines and centres are asked to consider the ethical requirements very carefully before allowing an investigation to proceed. In addition to the candidates identified in part 7a who had used independent measures, it became clear as candidates described their procedure that more experiments had separate groups for each condition. Again, centres are reminded that the experiment should use repeated measures design. Mostly candidates were able to describe an appropriate procedure and some of the controls and variables they had considered. A few investigations were very brief and contained no real details of the procedure used.

Examiner Tip

Centres should ensure that the practical investigation meets the requirements outlined in the specification

Question 8

This question was an 8 mark open response question which was assessed using the levels based marking criteria. The candidate was expected to evaluate their contemporary study. There were 4 A01 and 4 A03 marks available. There are two choices for the contemporary study; either Darling (2007) or Saachi (2007). Very few candidates opted for the Darling study. The information about the study was brief and usually only demonstrated isolated elements of knowledge. There was often no real attempt at evaluation. Most candidates had prepared Saachi as their contemporary study. Knowledge and understanding was mostly accurate (giving Level 2 marks) but very few candidates displayed a thorough understanding of the study. Evaluation

points were often attempted without the relevant AO1 points to form the foundation of the point. Without details of the study, evaluation points tended to be generic and lacking a coherent chain of reasoning. Most responses were Level 2 with some more developed attempts reaching the lower part of Level 3. This question was straightforward but demanded good knowledge and understanding of a key study and so the responses were disappointing overall.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should look at the command term in a question carefully

Section C

Question 9

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 and AO3 response required. Thus candidates were expected to give equal emphasis to knowledge and understanding and justification in this answer.

The knowledge and understanding aspects of this questions were to describe the working memory model. Candidates should outline the basic configuration of the model and perhaps give a brief description of its component parts. This level of description was rarely provided. Some candidates identified that it was a model of short- term memory and listed the different parts without any elaboration. The knowledge and understanding failed to progress beyond isolated elements in many cases.

A few candidates muddled working memory model with the multi store model. Evaluation part of the essay was largely generic without elaboration of logical chains of reasoning being developed. A few candidates included some research evidence. The most popular evidence came from Shallice and Warrington's study of KF. Candidates rarely developed this information to make a strong evaluation point. Several candidates attempted a conclusion to address the question 'to what extent' but they had limited evidence to support the argument. Most responses achieved either level 1 or 2. Knowledge of the working memory model was scant and poorly expressed making this essay disappointing.

Examiner Tip

Candidates should develop AO3 points to provide a logical chain of reasoning in the longer essay questions.

