

OCR Report to Centres

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J611/R/12J

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Psychology (J611)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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Overview

Both B541 and B543 attracted high entries for a January examination suggesting that many Centres are taking advantage of the unitised nature of the course. Although less popular, there was also an entry for B542. The majority of the cohort continue to come from KS4 with many following a two year programme.

Overall, candidates appear well prepared for the different units and show a sound understanding of the different content and themes that make up the GCSE. There was very little evidence of candidates confusing topics, and they continue to get better at distinguishing between theories and studies. However, questions focusing on applications still seem to ‘throw’ a significant minority of candidates. Some candidates need be clearer on what is required of them when they are required to evaluate. Interestingly, when evaluation skills are assessed with reference to limitations, criticisms, strengths and weaknesses this seems to cause few problems. This would imply the issue is more to do with candidates reading of the questions rather than their ability to demonstrate the skill itself.

In this particular series, it was noted how many candidates demonstrated impressive knowledge of the core studies, especially in terms of procedure and findings. Candidates are also beginning to show progress in terms of contextualising their responses on the Research in Psychology examination paper. Essays were of a high standard this series too, but more candidates should aim for top band scores by developing their written communication skills and aiming for more coherency in their responses.

B541 Studies and Applications in Psychology 1

General Comments

The performance on this unit was similar to previous series. The paper elicited a wide range of responses, as we would expect with a non-tiered paper. Once again, it was pleasing to see so many candidates attempting all of the questions and there were some particularly impressive attempts at the essay question. Candidates also seemed to distinguish better between theories and studies compared to previous series of this paper.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) The vast majority of candidate answered this question correctly although some were not precise enough in their response eg offering 'girl' rather than 'female'. The most common mistake was to give Zoe's gender: androgynous.
- (b) Virtually every candidate scored one mark here by correctly identifying an example of Zoe's masculine behaviour.
- (c) Virtually every candidate scored one mark here by correctly identifying an example of Zoe's feminine behaviour.
- 2 This was well answered by many candidates with the majority scoring two marks for two features of the Oedipus complex. A number of candidates offered many more than this showing impressive knowledge of the concept. Almost inevitably, some candidates described the Electra complex and this could only gain credit where features were generic eg identifying with same sex parent. Too many candidates were not explicit enough about the lust felt by boys simply identifying it as love or even liking in some cases.
- 3 This presented few problems for candidate with many accessing all four marks. Where errors occurred, it was normally where candidates mixed up the two chromosome patterns.
- 4 The available marks were distributed fairly evenly across candidates on this particular question. The best responses clearly identified a limitation (eg biological theory ignores the idea gender roles are learned) and then expanded on this point either through further explanation or through example. One mark responses were often just brief statements or muddled responses or vague responses. Those candidates scoring zero marks often made imprecise statements that were not clearly about gender (eg 'If we are all biologically the same then why are their individual differences) or were not valid (eg 'it does not explain feminine males'). On the last point, candidates should be clear the biological theory can explain atypical gender development – it seems to be a common misunderstanding that it does not. However, it does not easily explain cross-cultural variations in gender roles, the rise of androgyny across generations, or how individuals can adopt different gender roles over a period of time – all of these criticisms did receive credit.
- 5 There were some excellent descriptions of this study, often going beyond the marks available. However, it is definitely worth some candidates reflecting on how much they need to write when there are only four marks on offer. Candidates were very good at remembering the details of the case study but their descriptions did not have the coherency and/or detail required for full marks. A common problem was candidates being very vague about the findings making comments such as 'it worked at first' or 'she did not feel right as a teenager' – leaving the examiner to 'fill in the gaps'. A significant minority of the candidates seemed confused about the background of the case not always being clear on why Bruce lost his penis and/or thinking it was an experimental set up.

- 6** Most candidates could correctly identify the characters from the source showing the three different attachment types. Where answers were wrong, there was no obvious pattern. It seemed to be something that candidates either knew or did not.
- 7** The vast majority of candidates scored both mark by correctly linking the key concept with its correct definition.
- 8** There were a wide range of responses to this question but most candidates earned both marks. The vast majority of candidates showed an awareness of the criticisms of Bowlby's theory but there was variability in how well they could express this. Weaker responses were not always clear on what aspect of Bowlby's theory was being critiqued (eg just referring to the existence of multiple attachments), or would try to expand on the point by repetition either through making a similar statement or by giving a superfluous example (eg listing relatives for multiple attachments). Common errors were to simply identify a feature of the theory without saying what was wrong with it, or to offer a limitation of Ainsworth's research.
- 9** This question elicited the full range of marks. Not enough candidates seem to understand that privation leads to more severe effects than deprivation which was what the question was looking for overall. Although marked generously, there is an expectation that candidates should understand that any effects will be long lasting and psychological – they were not always clear on this. The effects of deprivation and privation were marked independently of each other but where candidates gave a similar effect for the same process (often based around problems forming/maintaining relationships) they did not receive double credit. A common mistake was for candidates to offer examples of each process rather than their effects.
- 10** This well established type of question was answered better than similar questions in previous series but still elicited the full range of marks. Weaker responses did little more than offer the area of application (most commonly hospitals) whereas the best responses went on to outline procedures and policies relating to childcare with some explanation of their objective(s). A common misconception is that standard hospital or nursery practices are about preventing deprivation rather than the more realistic aims of promoting attachment, reducing separation protest and avoiding stranger anxiety. Some candidates offered more than one area of application (which was acceptable given the wording of the question) however, as a consequence, these responses tended to lack the depth required for full marks.
- 11** It was surprising how many candidates found this source based question challenging when examiners were essentially looking for two words ('heard' for (a) and 'reminded' for (b)). Most candidates knew which part of the source to use but a significant minority did not always use the relevant part eg only referring to what the teacher said for (a) and only referring to the science programme on TV for (b).
- 12** Most candidates knew whether the statements about Terry's study were true or false demonstrating sound awareness of the study's limitations.
- 13** The most common score was zero on this question as too many candidates described a theory or concept from memory rather than describing how it might be used or applied in real life, or simply did not attempt the question in the first place. Where responses did score marks, the most common application offered was use of memory aids. Weak responses did little more than name the memory aid followed by very muddled or vague descriptions and/or examples that did not clearly relate to improving memory. Better responses had clear examples, knowledgeable descriptions and/or sound explanation of how the chosen memory aid worked. Candidates that focused on the use of cues in police reconstructions often produced particularly good answers.

- 14** Most candidates could label the key features of the multi-store model and earned all four marks. Where candidates scored three it was usually because they correctly labelled the process of rehearsal. A significant minority of candidates scored zero and the common error here was to apply the stages of information processing to the diagram.
- 15** There were some very good responses to this question and those that earned full marks tended to do so through the breadth of their evaluative points rather than the depth – although some candidates made an excellent job of developing the idea that the model overemphasises rehearsal. Candidates should guard against making very bland statements (eg 'the model is too simple', 'the model ignores other theories') unless they are going to qualify this. The majority of candidates did score nothing on this question. A significant minority did not even attempt the question. However the most common error was to describe the multi-store model rather than evaluate it. This was surprising, as the 'evaluate a theory' question is well established and we know from previous series that candidates are capable of evaluating the model (as part of an essay). It seems, therefore, that candidates are not reading the question carefully enough or do not understand the command itself. It is particularly surprising that so many candidates went on to describe the model when they had just earned marks for essentially outlining it in Q14.
- 16** Most candidates were able to score full marks here. The definition of arachnophobia caused few problems for candidates. The identification of acrophobia caused more problems with some candidates' spelling of the term being so poor that it was not possible to give 'benefit of the doubt'. Common errors in defining agoraphobia were to confuse it with social phobia or with claustrophobia.
- 17** The modal score on this question was two marks – most commonly for identifying the therapy (with flooding being the most popular by far) and then being able to outline one feature of it. In the case of flooding this mark was often for the idea of over-arousal leading to calm. Candidates were not so good at being explicit about the fact that clients are exposed to their *worst possible* fear (for one mark) and that this results in forming a new association (for one mark). When candidates chose systematic desensitisation, they seemed to find it easier to describe well enough for full marks. At the other end of the scale, there were too many responses that relied on common sense references to counselling or 'facing fears' rather than a psychological understanding of behaviour therapy.
- 18** This was the question that was most likely to be missed out and most likely to score zero when attempted. It may be that the concept of 'preparedness' suffers from being attached to the alternative theory in this topic but it is still listed on the specification and therefore candidates should expect to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the term. The majority mistakenly thought that the term had something to do with being ready and prepared to face one's phobia. Even candidates with some knowledge of the term failed to offer a synonym for preparedness, and therefore scored just 1 mark for understanding its link to evolution, instinct or similar.
- 19** A significant minority of candidates avoided this question altogether but those that did attempt it normally scored something – if only for recognising that the theory says that phobias are learned/rely on experience of or exposure to the feared object/situation. Many candidates recognised that they should be making some reference to classical conditioning but only some could outline and apply this accurately. Common errors were to use the right terms (eg unconditioned stimulus, conditioned response) but in a muddled way or to use irrelevant examples (eg Pavlov's dogs, food avoidance). If anything, where it occurred, evaluation had more clarity than the description with points relating to the absence of experience and ignorance of biological factors being popular. Some candidates confused behaviourist theory with social learning theory although some strong answers used social learning theory to good effect when evaluating (ie direct experience versus indirect experience).

- 20** Nearly all candidates identified the right personality type and earned one mark.
- 21** This question differentiated well with candidates who did not appear to understand what the question was asking for (despite its appearance on previous papers) to candidates who could identify an area of application (most commonly prisons or schools) and then describe and explain a technique for keeping order. Candidates who chose techniques such as use of uniform or hierarchy often struggled to explain the psychology behind it. Candidates seemed to have more success with processes relating to operant conditioning. A common mistake was for candidates to offer a number of techniques which left the examiner crediting the best one.
- 22 (a)** This was a challenging a question but many candidates still managed to score one of the marks. Most could recognise the role of consensus in Jenna’s case – with some using the term while others described processes relating to it (eg not wanting to stand out). Better answers tended to draw on a number of psychological processes eg pressure of consensus, need to conform, observational learning. Weak answers were mainly based on common sense. Many candidates scoring zero misunderstood the point of the question and used it as an opportunity to discuss Jenna’s authoritarian personality and the need to order other children around. Another common error was to simply restate what was in the question – even if this was done using different words and phrases sometimes.
- (b)** Like 22(a), this was a challenging question but, again, most candidates could manage to score one mark – usually for some reference to the need for Jenna’s parents to use punishment more or more effectively. Although this was a question about situational factors (as with 22(a)), it still elicited another set of responses about Jenna’s authoritarian personality. It also suffered from too many common sense responses, as well as answers which basically reiterated what was in the question already.
- 23** This was well answered by the majority of candidates. Many knew the study well and there were very few examples of Bickman’s study being confused with others – most notably Milgram’s. Nearly every response gave a detailed account of Bickman’s procedure and findings – the differences were in the level of explanation (for example, clarity on how IV was manipulated and how DV was measured) and in accuracy (for example, a number of candidates mistakenly thought there was a different confederate for each uniform – introducing a confounding variable that never existed). There was more variability in the quality of evaluation. Most candidates attempted some evaluation with weaker responses offering a few brief points which had not been adequately contextualised. Meanwhile, stronger responses offered both breadth and depth in evaluation dealing with issues such as gender bias, cultural bias, ethics and the problems of controlling extraneous variables.

B542 Studies and Applications in Psychology 2

General Comments

As most Centres are using this unit for their terminal assessment, the number of entries was low for this particular examination paper. This gave an unrepresentative sample of the normal cohort and, on this occasion, meant results were skewed towards the lower grades. Centres should be mindful of this when reading the commentary on individual questions and when analysing the distribution of marks.

Comments on Individual Question

- 1 The majority of candidates did score all three marks here but not as many as might be expected for what was considered a reasonably straightforward question.
- 2
 - (a) Most candidates failed to score here, with many giving an answer that was more relevant to 2(b). Weak responses included simple definitions of crime rather than outlining the problem of defining the concepts. Those candidates scoring one mark often did so because their responses were implicit and the examiner had to interpret the answer further for them. Better responses focused on issues of cultural or historical variations in definitions, or on the role of intent – often supported by appropriate examples that helped to illustrate the point.
 - (b) This question scored better on average than 2(b). Indeed, most candidates earned both marks. The most common responses focused on the failure to report crime followed by a reason why this may happen eg fear of retribution. There were also a number of responses that focused on the problems of counting criminals as opposed to counting crimes but these tended to be more muddled.
- 3 Very few candidates scored high marks here, although most demonstrated some knowledge of the study. There was some confusion over who was studied, with a number of candidates assuming that all of the adoptees were criminals in the first place. Those candidates whom attempted to use the percentages for offending as part of their findings often got muddled about how these applied to results and/or what they showed. However, most candidates did understand the general conclusion that biological parents had more impact on offending rates than adoptive parents.
- 4 The majority of candidates understood what was being asked for here but, again, very few scored the higher marks. Candidates could normally identify and outline a number of ways that society's attempt to reduce crime but it was unusual to read a response with any real psychological content. The weakest responses tend to not directly address the question – in most cases, they essentially stated that we know why people commit crimes but did not go onto to consider the application of this to crime reduction. A significant minority of candidates failed to answer the question at all.
- 5 Most candidates could correctly name the child who was at each of the stages of cognitive development identified, but the pre-operational stage attracted slightly more wrong answers than the other two.
- 6 This question elicited a range of answers. Those candidates scoring one mark tended to refer to the idea of stages being in a fixed order although some did refer to the relationship between age and development. Very few candidates referred to both but those that did earned two marks. A common error was to focus on the universality of stages which did not directly address the question. The weakest responses misunderstood the concept of invariance completely by suggesting that order or timing of stages could vary between individuals.

- 7** Most candidates were able to correctly match the concept of decentring with its correct definition but it was common for candidates to mismatch the concept of object permanence with the definition of conservation (perhaps because it contained the word 'object'). This then meant that they had also failed to correctly match conservation to its definition.
- 8** Too many candidates misread this question and described Piaget's theory rather than evaluating it, despite the fact that they had already answered questions on the theory itself. A less common error – but one that occurred often enough – was for candidates to evaluate one of Piaget's studies. Those candidates that did correctly interpret the question often managed to earn two marks – normally by focusing on the problems associated with fixed stages of development.
- 9** This challenging question caused problems for many candidates. Although most attempted it, there were too many simplistic responses about what happens in schools or classrooms but that did not make a clear link back to cognitive development. Some candidates knew enough to make reference to terms such as active learning, scaffolding or the spiral curriculum but often could not go beyond this. Candidates need to choose carefully when just one way (in which research is applied) is required as they need to select a technique/practice/policy where they can say enough for the marks available. Candidates often became unstuck, in this sense, if they chose the concept of key stages in the curriculum.
- 10** Most candidates gave the right answer for 10(a) and 10(b) although Drs Black and Green were often muddled with each other where candidates failed to score. 10(c) caused more problems for candidates with a worrying number suggesting that Dr Brown was an area of application himself! Another common mistake was to identify perception (or perceptual abilities) as the area of application itself.
- 11** Most candidates could identify some aspect of Haber & Levin's findings, and it was good to see very few candidates mistakenly describing procedure. However, few candidates described the findings well enough to earn full marks. There was lot of vagueness about what was being measured in the study, and many imprecise descriptions of the different conditions. The best part of many responses was candidates' outline of the conclusion. This question was omitted by a significant minority of candidates.
- 12** This question elicited a range of responses. Many candidates scored both marks often focusing on the limitation of the sample. Weaker responses focused on the issue of ecological validity but often did not apply it well to the study in particular (which is not a 'traditional' experiment). Where candidates did not really know the study (as evidenced in Q11), they tended to have nothing creditworthy to say for this question. This question was omitted by a significant minority of candidates.
- 13** This was designed as a challenging question and candidate responses reflected this with very few scoring any of the three marks available, and a number not even attempting it. Credit was given for drawing a clear distinction between sensation and perception even though this did not directly address the demands of the question. However, this only earned one mark which is what the majority of candidates got if they managed to score at all. Only a very small minority could use illusions generally or a specific illusion to illustrate that distinction between sensation and perception.
- 14** A good proportion of candidates were well prepared for this question and scored full marks. However, it is a well established question, so it is a pity more candidates did not do better on it. Most candidates were able to name or outline two depth cues present in the picture and therefore earn the first two marks. Application to the picture caused more problems however. Common errors were: candidates not relating the cues to distance;

candidates simply naming a feature of the picture rather than explaining it in the context of the depth cue; candidates defining rather than explicitly applying the depth cue; candidates going on to apply a different depth cue rather than the one identified (most common where height in plane was identified but applied in terms of relative size).

- 15** Most candidates could identify the extravert character and the neurotic character from the source, with the former being easier for more candidates. However, many candidates struggled to adequately define a trait. Most showed some knowledge of the term but many were not precise enough in their response. The main problem was that certain responses were not explicit about a trait being psychological in nature eg just saying it is a characteristic as opposed to a personality characteristic.
- 16** This was a very well answered question with most candidates earning all three marks. Candidates, on average, demonstrated a sound knowledge of this study often giving detail that went beyond the marks available. It was also good to see nearly all candidates focusing on procedure rather than findings.
- 17** Candidates were generally very good at identifying those statements which were true and the one which was false, with none of the statements causing more problems than the others. Further evidence that candidates know the Van Houtte & Jarvis study well.
- 18** This question elicited the full range of marks. Candidates were good at following the instruction to describe (rather than the more common 'describe and evaluate'). Many candidates included a number of the key ideas in the description such as free will, self esteem, self actualisation and unconditional positive regard. However, many were limited to a middle band mark because they tended to define these terms as a list rather than describing them in a way that gave a coherent overview of the humanistic theory of self. The best responses could make clear links between the need for unconditional positive regard to promote self actualisation and raise self esteem, for example. Weaker responses tended to just focus on a limited number of key ideas and outline them in simplistic ways. Some candidates made the mistake of describing a trait theory or a study. This question was more likely to be missed out than any others on the paper.
- 19** Most candidates placed 'observed' in the correct place in the passage on social learning theory, and most knew not to use 'punished' in this particular question. However, many candidates got the ordering of reinforcement and imitation wrong.
- 20** Many candidates could begin to address this question by identifying at least one criticism of the social learning theory – with the ineffectiveness of punishment on behaviour being a common response. However, some candidates were limited to one mark because they failed to offer a second criticism or offered one which was a repetition of the first. A minority of candidates demonstrated the ability to clearly elaborate on their chosen criticism(s). However, too many candidates simply reiterated the same point through example – although this did put the criticism in the context of non-verbal communication, it did not serve the purpose of showing a more developed understanding. Very weak responses criticised techniques for encouraging/discouraging certain types of non-verbal communication (eg 'parents should tell off their children for using rude gestures) rather than criticising the theory itself. Such responses, of course, gained no credit. This question was not attempted by a significant minority of candidates.

- 21** Many candidates could identify an area in which social skills training might be employed (eg rehabilitation of offenders, customer services) and although the majority went beyond this in their description they rarely earned any more marks. This was because too many candidates focused on why social skills were important in that area rather than how they would be acquired through training. The best responses covered key techniques such as modelling, practice and feedback, and then related this to a clear outcome. Very weak responses concerned themselves with shy people and the need to get them invited to a party and, not surprisingly, scored zero marks.
- 22** Candidates' responses demonstrated a good knowledge of this study but the understanding was more variable which accounted for the differences in the banding of responses. Where candidates scored on this essay, the marks followed a normal distribution. Many candidates scored four or five AO1 marks for their description of Yuki *et al*'s study although there was a tendency to describe the findings in a simplistic way. There was more variability in the quality of evaluation but it was pleasing to see most candidates attempting a critique of the study. Some candidates were limited to one or two brief points with many making the mistake of saying the study was culturally biased. Better responses included an evaluative commentary which gave both breadth and depth to the essay although this was rare in this particular series.

B543 Research in Psychology

General Comments

A very high proportion of candidates attempted all the questions on the paper thus demonstrating the paper was accessible to almost all candidates. The examination paper and questions appeared to function as in previous sessions, with a fair spread of performance achieved through a number of differentiating questions. Many candidates showed a good level of knowledge and understanding of conducting research in psychology and the use of appropriate psychological terminology was better than in some previous sessions. As in previous sessions the 'mechanical' questions (matching lines and boxes, true/false etc) were answered well by the majority of candidates. However answers requiring contextualisation were frequently only awarded partial marks as the candidate failed to relate their responses to the Source material. As in previous examinations, the quality of written communication and the legibility of writing ranged from excellent to poor.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 This question was generally answered well with candidates quoting the aim from the Source material.
- 2 Many candidates managed to score full marks on this question as they were able to both recognise that an hypothesis should be a prediction and accurately identify both variables.
- 3 Candidate who did not score full marks on this question gave vague answers or failed to elaborate their answers adequately eg the sample was not representative; they only used two men and two women.
- 4 This question was answered very well.
- 5 This question was again answered very well.
- 6 Most candidates got this answer correct.
- 7 Although there were some interesting graphs, most candidates scored at least three marks on this question. Marks were lost by many candidates because they either failed to put a title or the title was not accurate enough. *This question proved a good differentiator.*
- 8 Many candidates were able to provide acceptable explanations of the difference between participant and non-participant observation. However few gained the additional mark by giving an accurate reference to or elaboration of one of the types of observation. Many candidates only scored one mark because they merely provided a feature of one type of observation and then the opposite for the other. *This question proved a good differentiator.*
- 9
 - (a) Many candidates were able to recognise that reliability refers to consistency though some still think the term refers to validity.
 - (b) Although some candidates were able to recognise that reliability could be improved by having more than one observer, many suggested how reliability could be checked rather than improved and therefore showed a lack of understanding in relation to the demands of the question. *This question proved a good differentiator.*

- 10 This question was generally well answered though some candidates failed to elaborate their answers in relation to the Source material, even though contextualisation did not need to be specific.
- 11 This was generally well answered. Candidates who only scored one mark tended to forget to mention that participants needed to be aware they were being observed.
- 12 A surprising number of candidates only scored one mark on this question. Many thought that case studies test cause and effect and involve large samples.
- 13 (a) Many candidates managed to score full marks on this question as they were able to both recognise that an hypothesis should be a prediction and accurately identify both variables. Some candidates lost marks here because they referred to a correlation, yet the Source said the questionnaire was to investigate whether the amount of sleep a person has **affects** their ability to learn.
- (b) Nearly every candidate was able to suggest an appropriate question and therefore score one mark. Some were able to explain why the question was chosen though many merely justified their suggestion by rephrasing the question. Most elaborated their answer by linking their suggested question to the other variable.
- (c) Although there were some very vague and basic answers, many candidates were able to make several suggestions as to how they would carry out their questionnaire and so gain at least two marks. *This question proved a good differentiator as it allowed candidates to show their understanding of psychological investigations and their ability to use psychological terminology appropriately.*
- (d) Although most candidates were able to identify an appropriate ethical issue, many failed to contextualise their answer in any way, not even by including the word 'questionnaire' as so only gained one mark.
- (e) Although the term 'social desirability' was generally well explained, many candidates failed to contextualise their answer and so only gained two marks.
- (f) Most candidates were able to identify at least a generic strength of using a questionnaire. However many failed to place their identified strength in the context of the study. Contextualisation did not have to be explicit but it could not contradict anything the candidate had suggested in other sections of this question.

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