GCSE

PSYCHOLOGY

41802 – Understanding Other People
Report on the Examination

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Unit 2: Understanding other people

General comments

This was the third Unit 2 examination under the new specification. Most students attempted to answer every item and this is an improvement on previous sessions. This year, no one section stood out as more difficult than others, which was the case in previous years. The paper seemed to discriminate well and the percentage of students achieving each grade is comparable to that in Unit 1. The mean mark has risen slightly, but this is expected given that schools/colleges have access to Examiners' Reports and mark schemes from previous years.

Students were able to engage with the stimulus material throughout the paper showing development of both AO2 and AO3 skills. In particular, the research methods section saw a significant improvement in performance compared with previous years, when students appeared to struggle with this section.

Answers to multiple-choice type questions were good to excellent.

An area of difficulty for students in the past was that of understanding practical implications of research. This year, students were able to identify quite well practical implications presented in a multiple choice context.

It was pleasing to see an improvement in how students used additional sheets to continue writing answers. However, some students still persisted in answering questions outside the spaces provided in the question paper and did not indicate where the rest of their answers could be found if they did run out of space. This created serious marking issues.

Students' performance in the QWC questions (3e and 4b) is outlined in more detail below but it should be noted that there was a clear improvement here. In the past, students often answered using headings or bullet points, which meant that the answer was not in continuous prose, limiting the number of marks available to a maximum of four marks. This year there was a clear reduction in the number of students answering in this way.

Comments relating to students' performance on specific sections can be found below. Areas of both strength and weakness are highlighted. It is hoped that these comments will help to inform schemes of work for this unit

Section A: Learning

Question 01 (b)

Students either knew this term really well, or got it completely muddled. Just over half the students gained the full two marks with over a third not being able to gain any credit. Vague answers, such as; 'When you remember something you have learnt' were common. Those that knew the term were able to concisely include both elements; the extinction of the conditioned response and its sudden reappearance.

Question 01 (c)

This item presented a few problems for students, with the majority of answers not gaining any credit. Often students simply outlined the process of positive reinforcement or token economy and used that for teaching Leah. Few were able to link it to a step by step process and even fewer could explain accurately the process of rewarding each stage or refer to moving closer to the desired behaviour each time.

Question 01 (d) (i)

This was one of the items where students were generally able to apply their knowledge to a new situation. The majority were able to gain all three marks and this was often through an explanation purely in terms of Sophie and her phobia of spiders. The example would include sudden and extreme exposure and the process of continuing until there was complete relaxation. There was reference to Sophie throughout and students were able to gain the marks with concise answers. Occasionally students confused systematic desensitisation (SD) with flooding and therefore did not gain credit

Question 01 (d) (ii)

Nearly all students gained at least some credit for this question. This was mainly due to an understanding of the ethical concerns that flooding brings. Many were able to compare flooding to SD accurately in terms of speed, ethics and cost. However some did not earn full marks as their answer only contained one or two points without elaboration.

Question 01 (e)

The majority answered this correctly. However; almost 10% of students did not attempt this item at all.

Section B: Social Influence

Question 02 (a)

Most students were able to explain the term social loafing with sufficient elaboration to gain full marks. Reference to the group doing a task and the reduction in effort showed a good grasp of the key term.

Question 02 (b) (i) & (ii)

Nearly all students could recognise the scenario as obedience rather than conformity. They went on to justify their reasons in different ways. The majority outlined the need for a legitimate authority in obedience and correctly identified the security guard as such. Some highlighted the likelihood of a uniform and its effect, whilst a small number received credit for outlining why it was not conformity. The key reason why students did not gain full marks was that they had not made their answers relevant to the scenario itself; for example, simply stating that people listen to orders if the person has legitimate authority.

Question 02 (c) (i) & (ii)

This was the first time a question required knowledge of a named study from the specification, which some students found difficult. Although many were able to describe one of the Latane and Darley studies (typically the smoke-filled room experiment), a large number described studies by other researchers; for example, Piliavin's New York Subway study. This gained no credit for part (i) but could still receive credit in (ii) if appropriate evaluation was given. There was confusion with other studies too and very occasionally these were not even studies of bystander intervention. For example; several students offered studies of deindividuation and social loafing.

When students chose one of the relevant studies, they typically performed well; in particular, the method and results were accurately outlined. However, sometimes the conclusions lacked clarity or direction, and this limited the number of marks awarded.

In (c) (ii), many students offered generic evaluations that only gained one mark. This is an issue that has been noted in both GCSE units previously. Nevertheless, students still tend to present evaluative points that could be applied to almost any study with no sign of understanding how these might be relevant to the study they have described. The stronger students were able to offer focused evaluations.

Question 02 (d)

The practical implication question was answered fairly well with almost three quarters gaining full marks. This is a different way of asking about practical implications, which seemed to make this area of the specification more accessible for students.

Section C: Sex and Gender

Question 03 (a)

Most students were able to explain what is meant by sex identity. The most common answers mentioned the biological aspect and then gave a very brief example; such as hormones or genitals. A few still confused gender identity with sex identity.

Question 03 (b)

The majority gained full marks for this question.

Question 03 (e)

This question proved to differentiate well. Approximately 10% gained the full six marks by explaining a few of the key points of social learning, such as imitation and modelling as well as referring accurately to the topic of gender. There were a few reasons why students were unable to gain full marks. One of the key problems was confusing social learning with other theories, especially gender schema theory and, less often, psychodynamic theory. This often led to a muddled answer with limited or no creditworthy material.

Evaluation was reasonable when SLT was correctly identified initially. Most answers focused on evidence for the model, either specifically or in general. Another common evaluation point was the fact that the model cannot explain all examples of behaviour; such as households where there is no strong same-sex model but gender develops normally or where there are siblings who share the same models but develop very different genders. The last two points, however, were often muddled or not fully explained: for example, comments such as 'SLT can't explain single parent households' or 'It can't explain why those in single families don't have gender disturbance' are not clear enough or elaborated sufficiently to gain credit. Reference to a lack of same sex models is needed to make it a valid criticism of the model.

There seemed to be a high level of confusion between SLT and GST. For example, students offered 'It cannot explain why gender identity starts at two.' A smaller number of students explained why it is 'bad' to have negative role models rather than concentrating on evaluation of the theory.

A significant number answered the question by describing a study rather than the theory. This again put a limit on the marks that could be earned. If students referred to a study as evidence for the theory, one mark was available. A conclusion to a study can form part of the explanation and an additional mark could be earned for this too. However, evaluation focused totally on the study described could only be awarded one mark. This limited the number of marks available to three marks. A very small number used the Bandura study but made no reference to gender and therefore earned no marks.

Section D: Aggression

Question 04 (a)

Students showed sound knowledge of the biological explanation in a variety of ways. Typically, they gained at least two marks, which was usually for reference to one of the features such as hormones, the limbic system or genetics. Despite being able to gain full marks from one explanation in detail, very few students were able to achieve this.

Common mistakes that limited marks included outlining ADHD as one explanation. Others outlined methods for reducing aggression such as drugs and surgery. Some students used studies to illustrate their answers and this was creditworthy. However, many spent a lot of time describing the studies rather than showing how the evidence from the research supported the explanation.

Question 04 (b)

There were some excellent answers here, with most students able to gain at least three marks. The best answers used Young et al's study of testosterone and monkeys or Raine's study of murderers and were able to describe each part of the study accurately as well as pick out clear evaluation. Barker's study of frustration and Bandura's Bobo doll study were well done too, although many answers confused the two studies and offered a mix of both. Similar to previous years, some students offered muddled accounts of Bandura's study with all its variations. These answers lacked clarity.

Again, as in previous years, students often spent time writing an aim, which is not required, or used a significant amount of the allocated space for the description of the method. This was most prominent in the Bandura study and this would then leave less time and limited space to present findings, conclusions and evaluation. Perhaps the reason why Raine and Young et al led to better answers is that students have learned a simpler and less detailed method whilst still including the key details in their answers.

Question 04 (c)

Here there was a spread of marks compared to most of the multiple choice/tick box items. One key point was that many students lost marks as they only chose three letters and left blank spaces. Some students seemed to think that they could only use the letters once, despite the instructions given. Others used the first letter of the theory or a mixture of both, thereby losing marks because their response was unclear. To earn marks, students must follow the instructions. A few simply 'ticked' the boxes.

Section E: Research methods

Students showed significant improvements in their understanding of this area of psychology. They consistently performed well across all the questions and for many students; this section provided the most marks, whereas in the past, it has often been the weakest section. This is in no small part due to the effort and work that schools/colleges have clearly done to improve students' understanding of the practical aspects of psychology.

Question 05 (a)

Most students could identify the correct sampling method. The one main confusion was with systematic sampling.

Question 05 (b)

Students were able to identify an issue that was relevant to the scenario either through naming one accurately, or describing the issue itself.

Question 05 (c)

This was reasonably done but many students only gained one mark due to the lack of elaboration / explanation, simply stating 'because it is in a natural environment' or 'they didn't know they were taking part'. Answers gaining two marks were able to add elaboration such as 'which led to natural behaviour' or 'so they reacted naturally'. A handful of students misread the question and offered reasons for why the study lacked ecological validity.

Question 05 (e)

This was probably the most surprising question in terms of students' answers. It was expected that this would differentiate well and that only stronger students would be able to gain 4-5 marks. However, students performed extremely well on this with the majority gaining at least three marks. However, there some key mistakes that often meant students were unable to gain all the marks.

The typical errors were in the title not being detailed enough or being simply a replication of the aim and no label on the Y axis. Most students could plot the graph accurately including four bars. One costly mistake was that some students only plotted the number of people who helped. This often meant they lost four of the marks available. Only the X axis was labelled correctly in these cases.

Question 05 (f)

Many students accurately used figures and information from the table to gain full credit. The main reason why some students did not gain the full two marks was because they simply stated the aim and then said that the 'table backs this up'.

Question 05 (g) (i)

Students are still struggling with sampling methods. This was by far the most poorly answered of all the research methods questions. Many muddled random sampling with other methods, in particular systematic and outlined putting 'them' into lists and picking every nth person. Even when they did get the right method, students often didn't make it specific to the scenario, which is needed to gain the AO2 marks, often missing out the bystanders and/or the need to pick 10.

There were the typical errors of simply stating 'pick them randomly from a list/off the street'. Others mentioned using a computer but nothing more than that so it was not possible to identify the practicality of the method. Students should be further encouraged to try to answer these research methods questions from the perspective of the person in the scenario: i.e. if they were the teachers, how exactly would they get the 10 people required for the study?

Question 05 (g) (ii)

This question was reasonably well answered with many getting 2-3 marks. Students often lost marks through a lack of elaboration or by giving a simple list-based answer. Some simply outlined what a structured interview was and that they were asked the same questions without actually saying why this would be an advantage. Another common error was the belief that structured interviews can only consist of closed questions and then advantages were given for closed questions which is not what the question required.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator