GCSE
PSYCHOLOGY

Unit 2 – Understanding Other People
Report on the Examination

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Unit 2: Understanding other people

General comments

This was the fifth Unit 2 examination under the new specification and there were many excellent answers. Most students provided answers for each item which is pleasing to see. Answers to multiple-choice type questions were very good on the whole.

Once again this year there was not any particular section that proved to be more difficult than any of the other sections, but there were individual items that posed problems for students. However, in the research methods section, students did not continue to demonstrate the improvements that have been apparent in more recent years.

Nevertheless, the paper seemed to discriminate well and the percentage of students achieving each grade is comparable to that seen in Unit 1, showing consistency in performance. The mean mark has fallen slightly and this may be at least partly due to the confusion between Social Learning Theory and Gender Schema Theory in Section C.

Students engaged with the stimulus material throughout the paper showing a development in both AO2 and AO3 skills rather than simply stating facts that they had learned. However, there is still an issue with responses presented in the Research Methods section. Many students struggled with the scenario and had very obvious difficulties imagining the investigation from a practical point of view. In fact, students often seem inflexible in terms of their knowledge of research methods such that although they know what terms mean, they are unable to adapt their knowledge to the stem given.

Another area of difficulty is the practical implications of research. This year, students again struggled to understand and explain implications with many describing applications or simply not understanding the concept of what the findings imply.

Those students who needed additional space to complete their answers usually continued with their responses by requesting an additional page. However, there were some students that continued their answers in the white space of the question paper. As scripts are marked online this can mean that complete answers are not always scanned and can therefore cause problems for examiners when marking.

There was a noticeable improvement in the quality of written communication which was assessed in questions 1(c) and 4(d) this series. In the past, students have often used side headings, note form or bullet points, which meant the answer was not in continuous prose; and therefore limiting credit to a maximum of 4 marks.

Comments relating to students' performance on specific sections can be found below. Areas of both strengths and weaknesses are highlighted separately. It is hoped that these comments will help to inform the teaching of this unit in future series.

Section A: Learning

Question 1 (c)

This was the first 6 mark question this year and students performed reasonably well on this. Most attempted the question and there were some extremely knowledgeable answers. However, only a minority of students were able to gain the full 6 marks despite having a good grasp of the treatment. This was usually due to missing out the exchange aspect of the process, often students suggested that the tokens alone held value.

Other students wrote only about positive and negative reinforcement without accurately linking these to an exchange system. It was also pleasing to see that students were usually able to engage with the stem and make the description specific to the scenario. Many could highlight the problems of effectiveness of the treatment beyond the context, the focus on the rewards rather than the behaviour itself including explanations of what it is and isn't effective for. Some students only provided a description and missed out the evaluation requirement altogether.

Question 1 (d)

This type of question often creates a problem for students as they do not like providing evaluation without first describing a process or concept. This year many outlined how aversion therapy worked which then meant rushed and reduced evaluation tagged on the end or running out of space before evaluation was attempted and then moving onto the next question. Also, many students simply stated generic points such as 'It is a good method' or 'It may work' without reasoned elaboration.

Better answers were those that provided a clear and concise evaluation of two points, such as the need for additional support with the treatment to prolong effectiveness, with some elaboration of at least one of those.

A minority of students failed to gain any credit here despite attempting the question.

Section B: Social Influence

Question 2 (a)

The majority of students accurately explained the term conformity with enough elaboration to gain full marks. These were often textbook answers. However, those that could not recall a definition and attempted the question tended to get the mark for referring to a change in behaviour but struggled to achieve the second mark.

Question 2 (b)

Again, there were mixed responses here. Students only needed to 'identify' the factors not explain them, but many provided much more detail than was needed. Many students failed to gain credit as they gave reasons for behaviour rather than factors.

The best answers simply stated two factors such as age, gender, number in the group and so on.

Question 2 (c)

Despite some improvements in distinguishing implications and applications, students often struggled with this question. Only a small minority gained full marks, with almost half getting no marks or not attempting to produce an answer at all. The better answers were able to apply what research has shown us to a specific situation in a clear and concise manner. This was often the example of behaviour in a jury, when using cutlery in a restaurant or knowledge of how a group of friends can influence behaviour.

Some students outlined implications of other behaviours such as obedience despite questions 2(a), 2(b) and 2(c) being linked solely to conformity.

Question 2 (e) (i)

Most students achieved the mark for the results, but very few gained the mark for their conclusion. Most had written something similar to "appearance influences helping behaviour," for the conclusion without making it clear what the actual influence was.

Question 2 (e) (ii)

The evaluation for this study was done very well. Students were able to apply their knowledge of evaluation of the Piliavin study well. Elaborated ethical criticisms were widely used and helped students gain high marks.

Section C: Sex and Gender

Question 3 (a)

Most students were able to identify all four required elements. Occasionally, it was difficult to distinguish whether students had written an X or a Y, so examiners would remind students to ensure their answers are written as clearly as possible, especially if something has been crossed out.

Question 3 (b)

Most students understood the focus of the question and gained 3 or 4 marks. Some students wrote 'because their role model did' as the reason for the data in both conditions, which was not enough to gain full marks. Others simply stated what either the boys or the girls did, meaning they did not fully explain each condition.

One of the most frequent errors was stating specific types of toy and why they might play with them rather than relating responses to the scenario, ie either Toy A or B. The gender schema theory was also sometimes used as an explanation. Some students misunderstood aspects of the question, such as the fact that it was different children in each condition. Examiners would encourage students to read questions carefully before beginning a written response.

Question 3 (c)

This question caused students difficulty, with almost half gaining no marks and only a minority gaining all 4 marks.

The most frequent issue occurred when students simply described the theory with none or very limited evaluation. Students frequently muddled SLT with GST and sometimes with psychodynamic theory. Often there was limited elaboration. Students often criticised SLT for not being able to explain how people brought up in lone parent families still develop appropriate gender identity but failed to refer in their answers to the absence of same sex role models. Many students suggested that learning from role models might be 'bad,' rather than providing an evaluation of the theory itself. Others simply criticised a Bandura study with no reference to social learning theory.

Question 3 (d)

This question caused students many problems as they muddled theories again. However, those who had learned gender schema theory were able to give very good answers. Many responses were based on gender labelling, stability and constancy without accurate explanations of the scenario itself. It is clear that GST and Kohlberg's theory are often confused by students.

Good answers explained why both Charlie and Alfie thought as described in the question and related directly to the scenario, often commenting on age and flexibility as well as how things may have / will change over time for each.

Section D: Aggression

Question 4 (b)

Students struggled to gain full marks here with the majority gaining just 1 mark or none at all. Often, the answer was not distinct from psychodynamic / Freudian theory. Few answers showed an understanding of exactly how the frustration-aggression hypothesis explains behaviour beyond 'frustration causes aggression'. Students typically failed to refer to the need for a trigger – an important aspect of the answer.

Question 4 (c)

This question discriminated very well with the better answers presenting specific details for each section and briefly elaborating on how these might affect aggression. Most students referred to testosterone being linked to aggression and many mentioned XYY chromosomes, although there was some confusion with the number of X's and Y's required. Some stated XXY or YYY instead of XYY. Others confused hormones and chromosomes, failed to mention testosterone by name or were confused about the role of serotonin.

Question 4 (d)

The second 6 mark question on the paper was answered quite poorly. One thing that seemed to confuse students was that the focus was on the reduction of aggression. However, many spent at least some of their time describing the development of aggression instead. This often led to a limited amount of information on reduction and sometimes none at all. Many students struggled to explain exactly how SLT can be used to reduce aggression and muddled this theory with others, typically psychodynamic. Many answers simply described Bandura's study of the development of aggression or his study on reducing aggression which again limited the number of marks awarded. Others simply referred to direct rewards and punishments rather than role models.

Section E: Research methods

There has been an improvement over the past couple of years in the quality of answers to this section but that was not the case this year. There are still many aspects of research that are misunderstood or where students are unable to apply their knowledge to novel scenarios.

Question 5 (a)

The majority of students failed to achieve two marks. This was typically due to a failure to mention recording the same behaviour independently. Many responses scored 1 mark, showing an understanding of the need to compare the records. However, common errors included writing about avoiding being seen or interviewing the students.

Question 5 (b)

The demands of this question often led to students struggling to give a full account of what they would do. Typically this was because almost no-one was able to give a specific, appropriate time frame for the observation. Many students simply stated 'at the start of school' 'as they arrive' or 'in the morning' but that was not precise enough.

Most students could identify a behavioural category that might be used (specific times or simply being late or on time) as well as the location (school entrance, etc) but many struggled to explain how data would be recorded, often simply saying 'to note down if they were late.'

Many students included unnecessary things like attitude towards being late, performance during the day and why they are late rather than sticking to the focus of the question. A number of students incorporated speaking to the students and essentially described something that was not actually an observation. This highlights a lack of understanding of the kind of detail needed for a replication of an investigation.

Question 5 (c)

Most students responded to Question 5(c) with muddled or inaccurate answers. Issues such as consistency of observations or inter-observer reliability earned credit.

Question 5 (d)

Most students gained at least some credit here by giving an example of each requirement, but many did not elaborate one or both of these, typically the disadvantage. The most common advantage related to the potential for high ecological validity which was elaborated by highlighting the natural aspects of the study. The disadvantage was often not elaborated well, such as, the

consequences of the person knowing that they are being watched – students could have referred to the impact on results to gain elaborative credit.

A number of students often discussed ethical issues, usually as a disadvantage and therefore did not gain credit.

Question 5 (e) (ii)

Many students were not able to outline this accurately and only gained 1 mark. Only a minority gained the full 2 marks. They simply stated, 'The group that the study is aimed at' without elaborating or giving another point. Examples were often detached from the stem and very unclear and many muddled sample and target population.

Question 5 (e) (iii)

Surprisingly, only a minority of students gained a mark here. Common errors included muddling the sample again by giving 'teachers in the staffroom' as an answer. Others put 'students or staff,' which would include more than just teachers. The most frequent error was a lack of clarity as many simply stated 'teachers' which is not specific enough.

Question 5 (e) (iv)

The biggest issue was with the closed questions, most students did not give an accurate closed question with stipulated answers to choose from. This meant that their attempts at a closed question could quite easily be open. Students should be reminded that they should always offer the options for answers when dealing with closed questions.

A less typical error was aiming the question at students rather than teachers or giving totally irrelevant questions that would not be used in that scenario.

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