

OXFORD

INTERNATIONAL  
AQA EXAMINATIONS

# INTERNATIONAL A-LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY

(9685) Paper PS03

Report on the examination

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June 2022

## **REPORT ON EXAMINATION: INTERNATIONAL A-LEVEL PSYCHOLOGY 9685 UNIT PS03 Advanced Topics and Research Methods 2 JUNE 2022**

### **General**

It was pleasing to see that there were several students who demonstrated a very good understanding across all three sections of the exam. Many of these students were able to both evidence and apply their knowledge and it was apparent that they had been well prepared for this examination. There were some variations in marks across the three sections with Section A (Psychology of Sleep) and C (Research Methods) answered relatively well and Section B (Schizophrenia) answered relatively less well. It was pleasing to note that most students appeared to manage their time well and completed all questions on the paper in the time allowed.

Many students seemed to engage with the questions posed but there was some variable engagement where students failed to address the specific demands of the question. The extended writing questions (Questions 4 and 7) were particularly poorly answered, and some students produced large amounts of content which was not explicitly linked to the question. It is imperative that students read the questions carefully and ensure they understand and address the specific demands of each question.

Students should also take care with the balance of assessment objectives in questions which involve extended writing. In questions 4 and 7, where students had to discuss (AO1 and AO3), some appeared to spend too much time on one assessment objective, usually AO1, and too little time on the other and thus were not able to access the higher levels and marks.

The quality of student responses also appeared to vary depending upon which assessment objective was being assessed. Students seemed to perform very well when demonstrating knowledge and understanding (AO1), slightly less well when applying this knowledge to novel scenarios (AO2) and performance was notably weaker when analysing or evaluating information (AO3). It is important that students develop equal understanding of each of the assessment objectives, so they can effectively address the demands of all three in the examination.

The responses seen in Section C suggested that some students had some practical experience of carrying out psychological research such as drawing conclusions and identifying types of data. However, there were other methodological areas where it appeared that many students had little or no practical experience and thus did not understand how to apply relevant concepts. These weak practical areas included non-participant observations and how to interpret the results of a Chi-squared test correctly. It is important that students gain such practical experience, so they understand these concepts fully and can then apply them in an examination setting.

Most students wrote their responses clearly in the space provided. However, some responses stopped mid-sentence and it was unclear whether the answer continued elsewhere in the question paper, or on additional pages. Students who need to write more than the space provided allows should use the additional pages at the end of the question paper and should indicate that their answer continues. They should also write the question number on the additional page. These additional pages will then be matched with the response and marked as a complete answer. It is also important that students do not

to write outside the boxes as this material may not be seen by the examiner and thus may not be marked.

## **Section A Psychology of Sleep**

### **Question 1**

This question was generally answered well with many students achieving Level 2 (3 or 4 marks). However, some responses were quite brief and did little more than identify characteristics and thus were limited to Level 1.

### **Question 2**

Most students seemed to engage at least partially with this question and were awarded some marks. However, some students simply repeated the stimulus material from the question and did not explicitly outline symptoms of insomnia. Other students briefly outlined symptoms and did not apply them to the scenario as the question required.

### **Question 3**

Most students were able to answer this question accurately and were awarded full marks. A minority of students briefly stated what exogenous zeitgebers were but were unable to give a clear outline in terms of their impact on biological rhythms.

### **Question 4**

There were variable responses seen to this question which produced a good spread of marks and thus seemed to be a good discriminator. Some students produced excellent responses which were clearly focused upon at least one restoration theory, whilst others produced less focused answers based upon theories of sleep in general and thus contained irrelevant material. In general, students were better at describing than discussing at least one restoration theory. Where students had included some discussion, this was effective in places but in other areas lacked focus on the question and often included material which was not clearly linked back to at least one restoration theory of sleep. A good example of this error is where students included discussion of methodology rather than theory which is what the question demanded.

## **Section B Schizophrenia**

### **Question 5**

This question appeared to be a good discriminator between students as there was a fairly even distribution of marks. Some responses demonstrated accurate and detailed knowledge of neural correlates as an explanation of schizophrenia whilst others were less detailed or contained inaccuracies such as statements of causation. Some students failed to use their knowledge of neural correlates to explain schizophrenia and thus produced limited Level 1 responses.

**Question 6.1**

Most students were able to at least state one strength of the use of anti-psychotic drugs but fewer went on to explain the strength as the question demanded. Some students wrote more than one strength and, although they did not lose marks for this, they did potentially lose valuable time which could have been better spent elsewhere. It was important that responses should focus on answers about the use of anti-psychotic drugs and not about possible strengths of drug treatments in general such as vague statements surrounding effectiveness without any explanation or elaboration.

**Question 6.2**

Most students were able to at least state one limitation of the use of anti-psychotic drugs but, as with question 6.1, fewer went on to explain the limitation as the question demanded. Once again, some students wrote more than one limitation.. As with the previous question, students needed to focus on the use of anti-psychotic drugs rather than the limitations of drug treatments in general such as vague statements surrounding side effects without any explanation or elaboration.

**Question 7**

It is clear that many students do not seem to have the skills to enable them to discuss issues of reliability and validity in the diagnosis of schizophrenia effectively. There were many weak responses to this question ranging from minimal knowledge of the concepts and how to apply them to the diagnosis of schizophrenia, to poorly expressed discussion which was not focused upon the question. Many students simply wrote about bias, co-morbidity and symptom overlap without any explicit reference to how they may influence the reliability and/or validity of the diagnosis of schizophrenia. Within this, some students demonstrated some accurate and detailed knowledge of studies into these areas, but again these were not used to discuss reliability and/or validity. When students did attempt to engage with the question, they would often simply write statements such as 'this lowers the validity of the diagnosis of schizophrenia' without any discussion or explanation. It is important that students have a secure understanding of issues of reliability and validity in the diagnosis of schizophrenia and are then able to discuss these issues using evidence where necessary.

**Section C Research Methods 2****Question 8**

Most students were able to engage with the demands of this question and many could produce responses which contained a clear and accurate conclusion with appropriate justification using the data from the table. Some students lacked precision and accuracy in their answers and failed to link their conclusion to 'asking question(s) in lessons,' which was required for Level 2 responses.

**Question 9**

Most students were able to correctly identify that the hypothesis should be directional and the majority went on to accurately explain why. There was some confusion between directional and non-directional hypotheses in some responses.

### **Question 10**

There were many full mark responses to this question with most students clearly demonstrating an understanding of types of data and ability to apply this knowledge to the study.

### **Question 11**

Most students clearly had a sound knowledge and understanding of covert observations. However, some students failed to apply this to the study as the question demanded which limited the marks awarded.

### **Question 12**

Few students seemed to understand what is meant by a non-participant observation and fewer still were able to explain this in the context of the study as the question demanded. Many students were seemingly confused with who was the 'non-participant' in the observation and produced inaccurate responses about the students not being participants in the study.

### **Question 13**

There was some variation in student responses to this question. Most responses focused upon controlling extraneous variables and many students were then able to elaborate upon this with examples relevant to the study. However, other responses were either quite brief or not linked to the study.

### **Question 14.1**

There were many excellent responses to this question with most students able to name two relevant ethical issues. A minority of students only named one ethical issue or wrote the same ethical issue twice.

### **Question 14.2**

As with question 14.1, most students were able to engage with the question and explain how the researcher could have dealt with two ethical issues in the study. Some students failed to address the 'how' part of the question and simply explained what the ethical issues were which is not what the question demanded. Other students failed to frame their answer in the context of the study and thus produced limited responses.

### **Question 15.1**

There was a fairly even spread of marks on this question which appeared to be a good discriminator between students. Many students demonstrated good knowledge of the criteria/conditions for use of a Chi-squared test, however, some did not fully link these criteria to the study and this limited the marks awarded.

### **Question 15.2**

It is clear that many students do not seem to have the skills to enable them to interpret the results of a Chi-squared test correctly. Some students were confused between the critical values and the probability levels and so used the wrong figures. Others identified the correct figures but then stated that the result was not significant. A minority of students understood how to interpret the results and often wrote clear and concise justifications and were awarded full marks. It is important that students have sufficient practice at interpreting the results of each of the statistical tests named on the specification, so they understand this process fully and can apply this understanding to a novel situation in an examination setting.

### **Question 16**

Most students were awarded one mark for this question and, in virtually all cases, this was for an appropriate open question. Unfortunately, most closed questions did not have the fixed options stated and therefore these were not clearly closed questions so could not be awarded credit. It is important that when students write closed questions, they always follow them with the fixed options to show that the responses have been limited by the researcher.

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