GCE A Level Examiners' Report

Psychology

A Level

Summer 2026

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Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each component.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.[1]

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (eduqas.co.uk)

[1] ***Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.***

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Executive Summary

In Component 1, candidates attempted more questions than in previous series, with therapy descriptions proving particularly accessible. AO1 performance was mixed; descriptions of assumptions were often weaker than in past years, and examples from psychology frequently lacked clear application to the assumption being assessed. AO2 skills showed continued improvement, with stronger candidates effectively applying knowledge using a range of cues from stimulus materials. However, some candidates relied too heavily on repeating stimulus content rather than fully applying psychological concepts. AO3 responses were generally better structured than previously but often lacked the depth of analysis required for the highest marks. Conclusions were frequently weak, repeating earlier points rather than extending evaluation. Successful responses developed evaluative arguments fully and produced meaningful, evidence-based conclusions.

In Component 2, performance across this component was generally strong, although candidates often struggled with examination technique in personal investigation questions. A recurring issue was the incorrect use of tense, with some candidates responding hypothetically rather than referring to investigations they had actually conducted. Candidates also confused methodological terminology, particularly in correlational studies where experimental language was frequently used incorrectly. Misinterpretation of command words, especially *identify* and *discuss*, limited marks for many candidates. Stronger responses demonstrated accurate methodological knowledge, carefully linked responses to the specific investigation, and addressed command words appropriately. Candidates benefitted from learning precise definitions and applying them accurately. Greater attention to examination technique, command words and contextualised methodological application would further improve performance.

In Component 3, candidates performed well overall, demonstrating stronger AO2 application skills than in previous series and improvements in AO3 evaluation. Most candidates used scenarios effectively to apply psychological knowledge, although some relied too heavily on repeating scenario material instead of demonstrating their own understanding. A common weakness was failing to recognise plural command terms such as “explanations”, leading to incomplete responses. Some candidates also confused biological, individual differences and social psychological explanations. Evaluation showed noticeable improvement, with fewer candidates relying solely on generic comments and more candidates contextualising strengths and weaknesses to the specific explanation under discussion. Strong responses developed clear chains of reasoning, used evidence purposefully and produced justified conclusions. Centres should continue to focus on helping candidates distinguish between explanation types, fully address all aspects of questions, and contextualise evaluative points.

Across all three components, examiners were sometimes concerned about the clarity of some candidates’ handwriting and presentation skills.

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COMPONENT 1: PAST TO PRESENT

Overview of the Component

More questions were attempted by candidates during this examination series than has been seen previously, with the description of therapies seeming to be the most accessible. AO1 descriptions of assumptions were not as strong as in the past, with examples from psychology often not gaining credit due to a lack of demonstrating application to the assumption in question. AO2 application skills have again improved but candidates do need to consider the whole range of key terms in the stimulus material if multiple terms are available. Conclusions are not required for AO2 answers, but they are considered if they are appropriate and bring in new information. Again, there was a distinct lack of creditworthy conclusions in AO3 evaluation answers with many simply being repetitions of what had already been analysed in the answer. Structure was better for AO3 answers; however, there was a distinct lack of depth with many candidates making solid evaluative points but not extending to give the depth of analysis required. As with the 2025 examination series, it was near impossible in some cases for examiners to be able to extract the information from candidate answers due to handwriting issues. If centres identify candidates with illegible handwriting, then practice is needed, or access arrangements should be explored.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 (a) Descriptions of the computer analogy generally attracted basic or reasonable marks. When the Multi-Store Model was used as an example from psychology it was often not credited because only the model was described with no link to the cognitive assumption of the computer analogy.

(b) Descriptions were written well but there were very few top band marks awarded due to a lack of examples that referenced both humans and animals learning in similar ways e.g. descriptions of Pavlov's research on classical conditioning were provided but with no reference to how humans learn through classical conditioning too. For this example, candidates could have referred to Little Albert, aversion therapy, systematic desensitisation etc.

Q.2 Reasonable and thorough answers were well structured and analysed a range of points that were extended well. However, some candidates did not provide the structure required to fully engage with the question. There were various confused points about ethics and consent e.g. Bowlby did not gain consent because the original interviews were not intended for research purposes and British Psychological Society guidelines did not exist in 1944. There was also some misunderstanding on the methods used with some candidates stating that it was an experiment. Top band answers provided clear conclusions, often bringing in social implications.

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Q.3 (a) Overall, for both drug therapy and psychosurgery there were a range of appropriate points made but with a general lack of depth; however, the use of terminology was much better than in previous examinations. Descriptions of drug therapy were not always focused on the action of drugs. Drugs were named correctly but were described incorrectly e.g. candidates named an antipsychotic but described how an SSRI worked. Psychosurgery answers were generally well written but again, there was some confusion between capsulotomies and cingulotomies.

(b) AO2 skills, overall, were better than has been seen previously. Weaker answers simply included the stimulus material repeated word for word. Top band answers displayed the key terms from the stimulus implicitly and referred to them on multiple occasions.

Q.4 This question was answered poorly as many responses were not linked to social implications. Mostly candidates evaluated implications for individuals rather than for society e.g. the effects of marriage.

Q.5 The AO2 skill required for this question was better than in previous examinations with many candidates applying knowledge to the full range of stimulus terms. Basic answers did not go beyond simply naming evaluative terms but then not analysing further e.g. stating that the approach is scientific but not giving any detail from the approach on where that is evident.

Q.6 Many responses featured dreams or Freudian Slips as behaviours but neither was appropriate. Some candidates tried to refer to the unconscious mind but confused detail with elements of the tripartite personality which did not attract any credit.

Q.7 Although there were many answers that attracted top band marks some answers on systematic desensitisation lacked depth with in vitro and in vivo techniques being confused and aversion therapy sometimes lacked range with generic rather than specific examples using the classical conditioning formula.

Q.8 Compare and contrast answers were structured well; however, when comparisons were made, it mainly related to the assumptions or therapies with poor examples to support the points made. Some responses contained descriptive rather than evaluative content.

Q.9 Many responses accessed the top of reasonable or bottom of thorough band. Content on the workplace and leisure tended to be described well but detail on education was very brief with little explanation of research studies to back up the points made. Weaker answers did not refer to the relevance of positive psychology ‘today’ and conclusions were weak overall.

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COMPONENT 2: INVESTIGATING BEHAVIOUR

Overview of the Component

Candidates generally performed well in this series. For the personal investigations, candidates must use an appropriate tense when responding to questions. If the question is asking about things they have done, then past tense is appropriate, whereas future tense is appropriate only is certain situations such as writing a hypotheses for example. Also, too many candidates are answering hypothetically when being asked about an investigation they should have carried out. One of the personal investigations was a correlational study and candidates were using experimental key terms. Candidates need to pay particular attention to command words and respond accordingly. The command words 'discuss' and 'identify' were the most misinterpreted in this series. Some candidates were not using additional space correctly by squeezing two lines of their response into one line for example. This made responses hard to read.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 This question required accurate identification. Part a was mostly accurate with some confusion with demand characteristics and internal validity. Part b showed more variation in accuracy such as identifying incorrect suggestions like order effects and Hawthorne effect.

Q.2 This question required clear definitions of key terms and candidates who had learned the definitions from the Eduqas resources scored highly. Many could define only one feature of the level of measurement and did not take their definition further. Some candidates confused the different levels. Part c received no credit when candidates defined the use of ratios (2:4). Examples were not credited as candidates were required to define each level of measurement.

Q.3 Part a required a clear explanation of probability, the symbol and the decimal. Many candidates could not explain probability correctly and showed difficulty explaining the symbol. Part b required a choice to be made using a clear comparison between both 0.05 and 0.10. Marks were lost for not explaining the consequence for choosing one of the significance levels. 0.10 was sometimes incorrectly interpreted as 1%.

Q.4 Candidates achieved full marks for describing that the values should be added and then divided by the number of values. When marks were lost, it was often for poor expression of this calculation, which then made the response inaccurate, e.g. add up the data sets. Examples were not credited as candidates were required to describe the steps.

Q.5 This question required an explanation of one strength of time sampling, and many candidates lost marks for generic responses which could be true of event sampling techniques or observations in general, without specifying how this relates to time sampling. Stronger responses used comparison between time and event sampling well to elaborate. Centres could give candidates an opportunity to observe a behaviour using time sampling then observe the same behaviour using event sampling so they can see the strengths that time sampling offers.

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Q.6 Candidates were required to give a description of the format used when reporting investigations, although there were clearly some candidates who had not prepared for this topic. Answers that merely identified sections gained minimal credit. There was some confusion as some candidates described peer review or described the use of ethics committees or ethical guidelines which gained no credit.

Q.7 This question was answered well when the candidate understood the concept of quasi-experiments. However, many candidates incorrectly offered evaluation of the setting (natural), data collected (quantitative or qualitative) or longitudinal studies which are not features true of all quasi-experiments so received no credit. Better responses made evaluation points specific to quasi-experiments, for example, quasi-experiments are more ethical as the IV cannot be manipulated or we cannot show cause and effect as the IV is naturally occurring.

Q.8 Most candidates were able to identify relevant ethical issues such as lack of informed consent, deception and psychological/physical harm. Better answers tended to link these more thoroughly to the actual content of the research discussing how the teacher became distressed when shocking the learner, e.g. sweating. Where marks were lost was a lack of engagement with the command word 'Discuss' which requires arguments that go back and forth (e.g. a lack of valid consent as they were told it was a study on memory and learning, but Milgram did this to ensure internal validity). A conclusion was also expected as this was an extended answer. The best conclusions showed analysis by considering the scientific understanding we have gained on obedience despite ethical issues, or whether it is unfair to judge Milgram's study by today's ethical standards. Centres must encourage candidates to only use ethical issues from the original article and to only use points from other researchers as part of a discussion to Milgram's claims.

Q.9 This question contained a series of sub questions relating to the correlation of screen time and sleep. As in all personal investigation questions, unless there is a link to the investigation, no credit can be given. This means that candidates who had rehearsed accurate responses to many research questions did not achieve any credit for generic responses.

(a) Many hypotheses were not fully operationalised, particularly with the variable of sleep, e.g., presenting 'quality of sleep' rather than number of hours slept. Many hypotheses were presented as experimental or as an alternative hypothesis, which received no credit. Candidates who phrased their response as a finding (e.g., 'there was no relationship…' or 'there is no relationship…'.) rather than a predictive statement received no credit.

(b) (i) Most candidates identified they had used opportunity sampling but could not describe it. Centres may wish to emphasise that opportunity sampling is not about the sample being willing or able to take part, it is about the convenience and accessibility to them as the researcher. Some candidates could not develop their response further by describing what made their sample convenient, e.g., they were selected from my psychology class. Some candidates gained no credit as future tense was used.

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(ii) For opportunity sampling, many candidates continue to offer the limited point 'quick and easy'. This kind of evaluation should be discouraged. Quick and easy are subjective terms and are thus not eligible for credit unless it is compared to another sampling method, such as 'I used an opportunity sample as this was a quicker and easier way of selecting participants than stratified sampling…'. Candidates tended to do better in the disadvantage element of this question. Candidates should write this response in past tense because we are asking them to evaluate a sampling technique they have carried out themselves.

(c) Successful responses were able to provide evaluation that was explained and then justified. Too often, candidates used experimental language which gained no credit as this question is about correlations which do not offer causal conclusions, e.g. 'we could see how sleep impacts screen time' or 'sleep was the IV and screen time was the DV'.

Q.10 These questions asked about the experiment on language and music. As in all personal investigation questions, unless there is a link to the investigation, no credit can be given.

(a) (i) This question required clear identification of a location followed by a description. Some candidates chose to evaluate their location for this question, which gained no credit. Centres should encourage understanding of the term 'location of research' from the specification as this clearly confused some candidates.

(ii) This question required a justification for the use of the location described in 10(a)(i). Successful candidates were able to elaborate on their justification further.

(b) Most candidates were able to identify an ethical issue but further descriptions of these ethical issues were not required as the command word was to 'identify' ethical issues. Stronger responses went on to explain how each ethical issue was dealt with when they carried out their research. Weaker responses suggested a hypothetical way to manage the issue. When answering this style of question, centres need to explain to candidates that they must identify an ethical issue that they considered could be a problem whilst they were planning their investigation (so not one they actually went on to breach) and then explain how they stopped this ethical issue from arising when they carried out their investigation.

(c) (i) This question required explaining an issue of validity that could have happened, so candidates should answer using future tense (e.g., participants could have…, this may…). Candidates should see a question like this and consider explaining the threats to validity from the specification (e.g., researcher bias) or confounding variables that could have impacted validity in their investigation.

(ii) This question required a clear way of dealing with the issue of validity from (c)(i), so candidates should answer in past tense (e.g., we used…), and responses would get no credit for suggesting ways they could have dealt with validity. Stronger responses were able to explain how their method of dealing actually dealt with the issue of validity.

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(d) Successful candidates were able to give three reasons to justify the test they identified. As with previous series, weaker responses gave correct reasons without contextualised justifications.

Q.11 This question asked about the novel scenario. As in all previous series, no credit can be awarded if the response does not link to the scenario.

(a) (i) Most candidates were able to identify the independent variable. Candidates who did not express that something had changed gained no credit, e.g. 'time of year' does not indicate a change has occurred.

(ii) Most candidates were able to identify the dependent variable. Candidates who did not express what was measured gained no credit, e.g. 'drawings of Santa' does not indicate that the size/height of the drawings were measured.

(b) Stronger responses were able to identify the scenario was a repeated measures design and give one strength and one weakness. Candidates should explain how their point has an effect of the study to show a developed response. Candidates needed to link their response to the scenario, but this wasn't always the case as some candidates evaluated repeated measures d in general with no link. Some candidates incorrectly evaluated the wrong experimental design. There was some confusion with the term 'experimental design' with some candidates evaluating longitudinal or answering in reference to test-retest reliability. Centres need to draw attention to features that apply to all experimental designs that will get no credit, such as allowing data to be compared between the two conditions.

(c) Candidates that knew the steps to calculate standard deviation generally did very well when calculating the standard deviation for November. The question required candidates to show their workings and marks were lost per step when workings were not provided or were inaccurate. Some candidates lost marks by not giving their final answer to two decimal places. There were a few errors with some candidates' steps. Most notably candidates divided by n (8) and not n-1 (7). Centres are encouraged to practise laying out worked responses so that the workings are clear to follow.

(d) This question required candidates to evaluate standard deviation followed by justification. Some candidates offered a definition. Stronger responses used comparison between standard deviation and the range well to elaborate, but responses that compared it with the measures of central tendency gained no credit. Responses arguing that the standard deviation is time consuming to calculate must be compared to the range to get credit. Many candidates identified several evaluative points but these were not developed, whereas stronger responses chose two points and offered clear justification. As this question was AO3 no link to the scenario was required.

Q.12 This question asked about the novel scenario. As in all previous series, no credit can be awarded if the response does not link to the scenario.

(a) Stronger responses explained one weakness and then justified the impact this would have for the shop owner. Candidates are encouraged to address the demands of the question by giving a weakness if quantitative data and not giving a strength of qualitative data.

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(b) This question required candidates to explain and deal with an issue of reliability and as with previous series, candidates struggled with this. Incorrect responses focused on validity issues (e.g., lack of a representative sample, social desirability). Creditworthy suggestions included the fact participants were only tested once and the order the ice cream flavours were tasted. For the issue of reliability, candidates are encouraged to focus on key terminology that depict an issue (e.g., some participants, inconsistency and different) and deal with the issue (e.g., consistent, all participants equally, same for all/each participant).

(c) This question required candidates to compare the observed value with the critical value to reject the null hypothesis. Some candidates gave the rule for chi-square ('the observed value needs to be greater or equal to the critical value') and got no credit as it was not applied to the study.

(d) As this question was AO3 no link to the scenario was required. This question required candidates to evaluate primary sources. Stronger responses took heed of the question and supported their response with evidence from a named study that used primary sources. Explaining research that uses secondary sources only gained no credit (e.g., Myers and Diener). Suggesting that a weakness of using primary sources is that they are time consuming could only get credit if it was compared to being more time consuming than using secondary sources.

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COMPONENT 3: IMPLICATIONS IN THE REAL WORLD

Overview of the Component

Most candidates responded well to the requirements of this component, showing stronger AO2 skills than in previous series. In many cases, improvements in AO3 were also evident, with responses showing greater depth and more purposeful evaluation.

A recurring issue throughout this series was candidates not recognising that questions referring to 'explanations' required them to provide more than one explanation. Some candidates also confused different types of explanation, for example offering individual differences explanations when social psychological explanations were required. Centres should continue to ensure that candidates can clearly distinguish between biological, individual differences and social psychological explanations, and understand the importance of addressing every part of the question to maximise the marks available.

Candidates generally made effective use of the scenarios to apply their psychological knowledge. However, a noticeable proportion relied too heavily on repeating information from the scenario rather than using it to demonstrate their own psychological knowledge. Centres should remind candidates that AO2 assesses the application of knowledge, not just the reproduction of information provided in the scenario. In some responses, this overreliance also exposed weaknesses in AO1 knowledge and understanding with candidates appearing to use details from the scenario to compensate for less secure knowledge of the underlying psychological concepts.

Performance in AO3 also showed improvement, with fewer candidates relying solely on generic comments such as "it is reductionist." More candidates who did so then contextualised their evaluation, enabling them to move beyond the superficial band and produce more developed responses. Centres should continue to encourage candidates to explain why a point is a strength or weakness of the specific explanation being evaluated, rather than relying on generic evaluative comments.

As in earlier examination series, some scripts were affected by poor handwriting, which at times made responses difficult to read. Centres are encouraged to consider appropriate access arrangements where a candidate's handwriting may affect the clarity of their work.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 Addictive behaviours continues to be a popular choice with approximately 60% of candidates attempting this question.

(a) This question required candidates to outline biological explanations of addiction. Overall, candidates generally recognised that the use of the plural term 'explanations' required more than one explanation and were able to select appropriate biological explanations. This question was often answered relatively well, with most candidates identifying dopamine and genes as appropriate starting points.

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The strongest responses showed good breadth and depth across both explanations, for example by linking dopamine to different stages of addiction using accurate psychological terminology and referring to multiple genes alongside relevant supporting research.

(b) Responses to this question tended to fall into two categories: well-developed answers that clearly established the required link, or largely descriptive responses that gained limited credit. The best answers clearly linked cognitive bias to a method of modifying addictive behaviours. However, many candidates simply described cognitive bias and/or a method of modifying addictive behaviour (most commonly aversion therapy) without explaining the relationship between them. As a result, these responses remained descriptive rather than demonstrating application.

(c) Responses often lacked range, with many candidates producing only two evaluative paragraphs followed by a brief overall conclusion. Some evaluations also lacked depth, relying on generic points such as "it is reductionist" without relating this directly to the biological explanation being evaluated or explaining why this represented a strength or weakness. Stronger responses used mini conclusions effectively to draw together and justify their evaluative points, producing a more coherent overall chain of reasoning.

Q.2 With just under 20% of candidates attempting this question, Autistic spectrum behaviours is still one of the least popular of the Section A topics.

(a) This question presented difficulties for some candidates, with a number confusing individual differences and social psychological explanations. The most successful responses focused on theory of mind and weak central coherence theory. However, some candidates instead described the refrigerator mother or empathising–systemising explanations, which were not creditworthy. Where one inappropriate explanation was included, candidates needed to provide one accurate and reasonably detailed explanation to access the 1–2 mark band. Many responses, however, contained only brief or superficial descriptions of the remaining explanation. The strongest responses showed secure knowledge of both explanations, used appropriate psychological terminology, and supported their answers with relevant research, particularly the work of Frith or Baron-Cohen.

(b) This question presented similar difficulties to Question 2(a), with some candidates confusing individual differences and social psychological explanations. Candidates had to make clear links between a social psychological explanation and an appropriate method of modifying autistic spectrum behaviours. The strongest responses established explicit links between the explanation and the method, for example connecting the refrigerator mother explanation with relationship development intervention (RDI) or the empathising–systemising theory with Lego therapy. As highlighted in previous examiner reports and reflected in responses across the addiction and bullying options this series, some candidates described explanations and/or methods but did not clearly apply the explanation to the chosen method. Without this explicit link, responses lacked sufficient development to reach the higher mark bands.

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(c) This question was generally well attempted and proved to be the best answered of the autistic spectrum behaviours questions. The most commonly evaluated explanations were the refrigerator mother explanation and the empathising–systemising theory. There was an improvement compared with last year, with fewer candidates producing superficial evaluation that simply named evaluative terms without developing or contextualising them, for example, "it is reductionist". Centres should remind candidates that evaluative points need to be linked directly to the explanation being discussed. If the same point could be applied to almost any explanation without alteration, it is unlikely to move beyond a superficial level. The strongest responses contextualised their evaluation to the specific explanation being discussed, developed a clear chain of reasoning to explain why each point represented either a strength or a weakness, and included effective mini conclusions alongside a well-justified overall conclusion.

Q.3 Bullying behaviours remains the least attempted application, with approximately only 8% of candidates answering these questions.

(a) This question was relatively well answered, with most candidates selecting either cultural differences or moral disengagement as their explanation. The strongest responses demonstrated good breadth and depth, for example by exploring cultural differences across contexts such as school and the workplace and supporting their answers with relevant named research. As only one explanation was required, candidates were expected to demonstrate greater depth than would normally be expected in questions requiring multiple explanations.

(b) Some candidates found this question challenging, reflecting a pattern that was evident across several application questions within the component. Candidates had to explain how a biological explanation could be applied to a method of modifying bullying behaviour. The strongest responses made clear and explicit links between evolved gender differences and interventions such as sporting activities, explaining how these could provide an acceptable outlet for competition, aggression, and the establishment of social hierarchy thereby reducing opportunities for bullying behaviour. Some stronger responses developed this further by linking evolved gender differences to reproductive success, explaining how participation in sport could provide an alternative means of displaying desirable traits and attracting a mate thereby reducing the need to establish status through bullying.

(c) Some candidates found this question challenging and as was also evident elsewhere on the paper, overlooked the plural term 'explanations', providing only one explanation. Others confused social psychological explanations with individual differences explanations, which limited the marks they could achieve. Some candidates also offered generic evaluative points such as "it is reductionist" without linking them directly to the specific explanation of bullying. In some cases, the evaluation related to bullying behaviour more generally rather than the explanation being assessed. The strongest responses contextualised their evaluation to the explanation they were discussing, developed a clear chain of reasoning that explained why each point represented a strength or weakness, and included effective mini conclusions alongside a well-supported overall conclusion.

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Q.4 Criminal behaviours was the second most popular of the Section A applications with just over 80% of candidates attempting these questions.

(a) Many candidates answered this question effectively and showed a good level of knowledge of their chosen biological explanation. The role of the amygdala and inherited criminality were the most popular responses, with very few candidates selecting the disinhibition hypothesis. Stronger responses on the amygdala accurately explained its dysfunctional functioning, including impaired fear conditioning and increased aggression. Those choosing inherited criminality often referred to candidate genes such as MAOA and CDH13, alongside evidence from twin, adoption and family studies, as well as the diathesis–stress model. Weaker responses either described research evidence without explaining how it supported inherited criminality, or lacked the precision and detail needed to accurately explain the role of the amygdala in criminal behaviour.

(b) This proved to be a challenging question for candidates, with the examining team noting that some candidates demonstrated knowledge of the explanations rather than evaluating them, the skill required in the question. Although candidates made better use of the scenario than in previous series, many referred to details from it without using those details to develop evaluative points. Others focused on only one social psychological explanation or offered only superficial evaluation of two explanations therefore limiting the marks available. Generic comments such as "it is reductionist" or "it is deterministic" remained common, but these were often presented without explaining why they represented strengths or weaknesses of the explanations being evaluated. The strongest responses evaluated two appropriate social psychological explanations (most commonly differential association and gender socialisation) and used the scenario effectively to support their evaluation. For example, some candidates linked Richard's suspension to research investigating gender bias in sentencing, while others contrasted his family background with evidence supporting biological explanations of criminal behaviour.

Q.5 Answered by approximately 85% of candidates, Schizophrenia is the most popular of the Section A topic questions.

(a) This question was generally well answered, with many candidates showing a good understanding of CBT for schizophrenia. Most responses outlined the five stages of CBT, with stronger candidates systematically explaining each stage using schizophrenia specific terminology and characteristics. For example, many explained the importance of rapport in relation to symptoms such as paranoia. Some candidates also successfully applied broader cognitive approaches, including the ABCDE model. Higher-scoring responses often referred to Smith's five stages, while weaker responses described CBT more generally with limited contextualisation to schizophrenia, or confused it with other forms of CBT.

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(b) This question proved challenging for many candidates, with responses tending to be either well-developed or largely descriptive. The strongest responses clearly linked a social explanation to a suitable method of modifying behaviour. The most common examples seen were dysfunctional families to family intervention or high expressed emotion (EE) to CBT. Less successful responses described the explanation and the method separately but did not explain how the social explanation could be applied to the chosen method of modifying behaviour. Some candidates also suggested inappropriate methods, such as moving to a rural area for urbanicity. A small number confused social explanations with psychodynamic explanations, limiting the marks available.

(c) This question was generally well answered, with responses fairly evenly divided between dysfunctional family and sociocultural explanations. Candidates were generally well prepared to use research to support their evaluation. However, weaker responses often referred to research only in general terms or simply named studies without using specific findings to develop evaluative points. Generic comments such as reductionism and determinism remained evident, whereas stronger responses explained why these issues represented strengths or weaknesses by comparing social explanations with biological explanations of schizophrenia. A notable number of candidates incorrectly identified the schizophrenogenic mother as a social explanation, meaning these responses could not be credited. Conclusions were often brief or repetitive, whereas stronger responses presented a clear chain of reasoning, drawing on well-developed, evidence-based evaluation to reach a justified conclusion.

Q.6 Stress continues to be a less popular choice with approximately 33% of candidates attempting these questions.

(a) Most candidates responded well to this question. Stronger responses adopted a systematic approach, addressing each characteristic of stress in turn before applying it directly to the scenario. Rather than adding application at the end of the response, these candidates integrated it throughout, clearly showing how each characteristic was illustrated by the details in the scenario. Weaker responses tended to be less focused, moving between different aspects of stress without a clear structure. Some also included material that was not directly relevant to the question. Encouragingly, the use of the scenario was more consistent than in previous series. Most candidates applied their knowledge throughout their responses, with relatively few omitting applications altogether or including extended sections that made no reference to the scenario.

(b) Most candidates responded reasonably well to this question. However, compared with some other topics, responses were often shorter, suggesting that some candidates may have been affected by time constraints. Consequently, evaluation tended to be less developed, with many candidates making only brief references to supporting research rather than using research evidence to develop their points in detail. Stronger responses integrated relevant research more effectively, using it consistently to support and strengthen their evaluation throughout.

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Q.7 This was the most popular of the two controversies, with just under 70% of candidates choosing to answer this question. Overall, the standard of responses was good, with many candidates producing thoughtful and well-developed answers. Candidates showed good knowledge of relevant evidence, most commonly drawing on the research of Harlow and Lorenz, alongside Behaviourist research and animal-assisted therapy. The strongest responses used research evidence purposefully to support balanced evaluation. Rather than describing studies in isolation, candidates selected relevant evidence to build and justify their arguments, integrating research throughout their discussion. Less successful responses often demonstrated good recall of research but relied more heavily on description than evaluation. Some described studies (particularly Harlow's research) in considerable detail before making only brief or generic evaluative comments. Although many responses demonstrated secure understanding, some were relatively brief, suggesting that candidates may not have allocated sufficient time to this question.

Q.8 Although this question was less popular than Question 7, the overall standard of responses was good, with many candidates demonstrating secure knowledge of the issues surrounding this controversy. Candidates commonly drew on the research of Freud, Kohlberg and Gilligan, and many used key terms such as alpha bias and beta bias accurately. However, weaker responses sometimes confused these concepts, with studies occasionally being attributed to the wrong type of bias. The strongest responses used this evidence to construct balanced arguments about the extent to which psychology is sexist. In contrast, less successful responses tended to rely on broad assertions or described research without fully explaining how the evidence supported their argument. Conclusions seen were often brief or simply repeated earlier points, whereas stronger responses drew together their evaluation to reach a clear, balanced and well-justified overall judgement.

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