



Course report 2024

National 5 Psychology

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 1,136

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 1,089

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	452	Percentage	41.5	Cumulative percentage	41.5	Minimum mark required	70
B	Number of candidates	212	Percentage	19.5	Cumulative percentage	61.0	Minimum mark required	60
C	Number of candidates	157	Percentage	14.4	Cumulative percentage	75.4	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	121	Percentage	11.1	Cumulative percentage	86.5	Minimum mark required	40
No award	Number of candidates	147	Percentage	13.5	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Feedback received by centres indicated that the paper was fair and accessible.

Question 1(b): This 4-mark question on explaining one strength and one weakness of the restoration theory of sleep differentiated candidates.

Question 1(d): This 4-mark question on explaining how the Little Hans study supports the psychoanalytic theory of dreams also offered differentiation.

Question 1(c): This 6-mark question on describing Dement and Kleitman (1957) had less to distinguish marks but was still a valid question at this level.

Most candidates selected the individual topic of phobias rather than personality. This could have been because personality does not feature in the Leckie and Leckie textbook that many centres use.

Differentiation questions for the personality topic were questions 2(b) and 2(c). Question 2(d) on a research study had less to distinguish marks.

The differentiation question for the phobias topic was question 3(b). Question 3(c) had less to distinguish marks.

Question 4(c): This 5-mark question differentiated candidates as the question required candidates to apply their knowledge of cultural factors only (previously candidates have been asked to apply their knowledge of the whole conformity topic) to a scenario.

Question 4(e): This 6-mark question also differentiated candidates as the question required candidates to link the situational factors to Asch's research. This question had not been asked previously.

Most candidates selected the social topic of altruism rather than non-verbal communication. This could have been because non-verbal communication does not feature in the Leckie and Leckie textbook that many centres use.

Question 5(b)(i): This question on describing a research study did not differentiate candidates, however, 5(b)(ii), where candidates were required to explain how the results supported the theory, did provide differentiation. Question 5(c) also provided differentiation.

Question 6: The nature-nurture debate underpins this topic. A few candidates selected inappropriate studies when asked to describe a study relating to nature.

No adjustments were made to grade boundaries.

Assignment

A template was provided to centres this year for the first time. Most candidates submitted well-structured assignments.

Section B differentiated candidates as the candidates were required to link the research studies to appropriate psychological concepts or theories.

Section E also provided differentiation for candidates as it required evaluation and justification of the chosen research method, as well as description of variables, which can be challenging at this level.

No adjustments were made to grade boundaries.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Overall, candidates performed well in the question paper. We commend centres for preparing them so well. Most candidates gained high marks in the questions requiring descriptions of research studies and concepts. Many candidates performed well in the questions that required an explanation of strengths and/or weaknesses of research studies.

Question 1(a): Most candidates gave very good descriptions of non-REM and REM sleep, referring not only to the functions of different types of sleep but also to the stages.

Question 1(c): Most candidates gave an excellent description of the Dement and Kleitman study and could accurately describe its three aims.

Question 2(a): Most candidates gave very good descriptions of introversion and extraversion.

Question 2(d): Most candidates gave very good descriptions of the method/procedure of a research study into the biological causes of APD.

Phobias was the most popular individual optional topic.

Question 3(a): Most candidates gave very good descriptions of specific phobias and social anxiety phobia.

Question 3(c): Most candidates gave a very good description of the method/procedure of one study into the genetic inheritance of phobias.

Questions 4(a) and 4(b): Most candidates gave very good descriptions of conformity and minority influence.

Altruism was the most popular social optional topic.

Questions 5(a) and (b)(i): Most candidates gave very good descriptions of pluralistic ignorance and of the aims, method/procedure of a research study into the kin selection theory of altruism.

Question 6(a): Most candidates gave a very good description of the function of eye contact.

Assignment

Most candidates produced high-quality, well-structured assignments that indicated familiarity with marking guidance. There were fewer ethical concerns noted than in previous years. Candidates planned a wide range of research, demonstrating personalisation and choice.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 1(b): Many candidates did not gain marks for explaining one weakness of restoration theory.

Question 1(d): Many candidates lost out on marks when asked to explain how Little Hans supports psychoanalytic theory. It is important that candidates can link different aspects of the topics.

Question 1(e): Many candidates missed out on full marks when asked to explain one strength of the Little Hans study. Candidates who performed well focused on the advantages of conducting a case study.

Question 2(c): Many candidates missed out on marks when asked to explain situational causes of APD.

Question 3(b): Many candidates lost marks when asked to explain systematic desensitisation. Candidates could have increased marks by explaining how systematic desensitisation is based on the principles of classical conditioning. Some candidates explained flooding instead of systematic desensitisation.

Question 4(c): Many candidates lost marks when asked to apply their knowledge of cultural factors to a scenario. Some explained the factors but did not refer to the scenario. Some used their knowledge of individual factors, but no marks could be awarded for this.

Question 4(d): Many candidates lost marks when asked to explain normative social influence (NSI), as they explained compliance instead. They could have gained marks for explaining how NSI often leads to compliance.

Question 4(e): Many candidates did not gain full marks for explaining how situational factors may affect conformity. Some candidates explained the factors but did not state if they increased or decreased conformity levels. Some candidates did not refer to Asch's research, which could have been the original study or the variations.

Question 5(b)(ii): Many candidates lost marks when asked how the results of a study support kin selection theory of altruism. Some candidates only described the results and some only described the theory.

Question 5(c): Many candidates missed out on marks when asked to use their knowledge of the empathy-altruism theory. Many candidates demonstrated a lack of theoretical knowledge. Candidates could have gained more marks by referring to personal distress and empathetic concern.

Question 6(b)(i): Many candidates selected inappropriate studies when asked to describe a study relating to nurture.

Inappropriate studies selected included:

- ◆ Meltzoff and Moore (they found that young infants aged 2 to 3 weeks were able to imitate specific facial and hand gestures, suggesting an innate biological drive to form an attachment bond).
- ◆ Chartrand and Bargh ('the chameleon effect' refers to the nonconscious mimicry of non-verbal communication).
- ◆ Bandura's Bobo doll (investigated aggressive behaviour rather than non-verbal communication).
- ◆ Ekman and Freisen (concluded that facial expressions may be universal).

Question 6(c): Many candidates missed out on marks when applying their knowledge of personal space. Marks could have been improved by including zones of proximity.

Assignment

Section B: Some candidates gave good descriptions of the research studies but lost marks as they did not make a clear link between the studies and the concepts or theories. This section is worth 8 marks. Candidates should be guided towards 2 marks for each of the research studies and a further 4 marks for linking these studies to the concepts or theories.

Section D: Some candidates missed out on full marks when giving the hypothesis, as it was not clearly expressed in terms of the variables.

Section E: Some candidates missed out marks as they did not justify choices of research method and sampling method. Candidates can gain these marks by comparing with other methods. It is important that the justifications are kept specific to the candidates' own research. Some candidates did not give the full procedure (this should include asking for informed consent at the beginning and giving a debrief at the end).

Section F: Some candidates missed out on full marks as they did not explicitly explain how they would have avoided breaching ethical guidelines in their own study. Although there were fewer unethical studies than in previous years, some candidates were planning on:

- ◆ depriving participants of sleep
- ◆ manipulating phone or caffeine use
- ◆ using discussion in Jenness replication
- ◆ selecting under 16s as participants
- ◆ selecting participants from strangers

Section G: Some candidates lost the mark for references as they did not reference the research studies from Section B.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

We commend centres for preparing candidates well for the question paper.

Centres should deliver each topic as a whole to prepare candidates to be assessed on how well they can link different aspects of the topic (as seen in questions 1(d), 2(c), 4(e), 5(b)(ii) and 6(b)(ii)).

In the optional topics, it is important that centres select appropriate research studies, as these are not named in the specification. Centres should refer to marking guidance.

We recommend that candidates get to practise answering question papers to ensure that they can time themselves appropriately in the exam.

Assignment

We commend centres for preparing candidates well for the assignment.

We recommend that candidates submit a proposal so that centres can guard against unethical or impractical topics of study.

Candidates should get the opportunity to practise writing hypotheses.

When teaching the research studies throughout the course, it is good practice to describe, evaluate and justify the research and sampling methods.

We recommend that centres attend the [Understanding Standards webinar](#) later in the year.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).