

Level 5 Counselling Research in Counselling June 2018

Introduction

24 scripts were received from 3 Centres. The question paper was designed to test candidates' ability to develop a research proposal that forms the basis for a piece of research that could be conducted to evaluate counselling practice and/or a topic relevant to the field. It is intended that the research proposal should be a feasible project not just a theoretical idea. Candidates should be encouraged to approach this piece of work *as if* they were going to carry out the project (even if they do not intend to proceed to dissertation stage).

The relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria are shown below:

LEARNING OUTCOMES	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
The learner will:	The learner can:
Understand the field of counselling research	Review and evaluate key aspects of counselling research Critically compare research studies
Understand the contribution of the research literature to an intended research proposal	Identify, as an intended research proposal, a specific topic of interest Conduct a literature search on the specific topic of interest Develop a literature review demonstrating the current body of knowledge on the specific topic of interest

Distribution of marks:

Evidence had to be presented for each assessment criterion and these were graded as PASS or REFER – all assessment criteria had to attract a PASS grade for this assessment to PASS overall.

Comments

Overall, the standards achieved by candidates in this examination were considered by the examiners to be better than in previous series. There was evidence to show that candidates were working to the brief set out in the briefing paper and using the template sometimes making it easy for the examiners to find evidence that assessment criteria had been met.

In this series the main reasons for referral of the studies were:

- lack of clear research questions i.e. what the study was intending to find out (these were frequently confused with questions that would be asked of participants)

- inability to link data collection instruments (questionnaires, interviews, etc) with the espoused research methodology. Indicating a confusion about the epistemology of the project – this was particularly true where the research question involved investigating the effectiveness of X or Y and the proceeding to use qualitative methodology
- evidence of template answers – where all candidates in one centre had the same research methodology – some centres candidates all chose themselves as the research participant and employed research methodology that was borderline in it's ability to generate reliable evidence. Variety in projects, methodology and participants is to be welcomed.

1. Proposed area of research

Generally, this section was completed well by most candidates demonstrating a good discussion of the theoretical issues and relevance of proposed research to the field of counselling. In demonstrating the understanding of the research area good reference to pertinent literature is required. These references **must** be cited in the reference list at the end of the study as this is an important mark of scholarly endeavor at this level.

2. Importance of this research and the possible contribution to the field

Again, overall this section was completed well by the majority with some concise and thoughtful discussion indicating how the research was expected to contribute to debates/discussions in counselling. In some of the weaker studies there was a complete lack of any discussion of researcher positioning or any idea about the impetus for the study. This was particularly the case with autoethnographic projects. These considerations are important to avoid bias and selective use of the research data. It is imperative that researchers take steps to demonstrate that findings that emerge from the data and not their own predispositions and therefore this is a key consideration at the design stage.

3. Proposed topic/research questions/ethical considerations

The main problem in this section was the failure of candidates to concisely and clearly identify their RESEARCH QUESTIONS. It is important that the examiners gain a clear sense of what the intended research will generate in terms of knowledge (for self and/or others) and practice (for self and/or others). Unless the research question is clear then it is difficult to make a proper assessment of the suitability of the proposed research methodology. In considering the ethical implications of the research and the safeguarding of participants this *must relate to the actual research methodology being proposed*. It is not intended that candidates should provide a general discussion of research ethics but a discussion of *their* ethical consideration in the real world of *their* research project.

4. Relevant Literature on the topic/research area

The examiners will be looking at this section together with the information in Appendix 1 to determine whether the candidate has a sufficient grasp of the relevant literature and therefore the intended research is grounded in and takes account of major lines of argument that have been developed and ideas and findings of key researchers working on the same topic.

5. Research methodology and data collection methods

This section is meant to give an indication that a workable plan has been established that could (if it proceeded to dissertation stage be expected to generate reasonable results. It is **not** intended that participants should debate whether to use qualitative or quantitative methods identifying opportunities and limitations of these BUT, to establish a research methodology; briefly explain the choice; and, then convince the examiners that practical matters of undertaking the research have been thought through. In assessing this section this section, the examiners will be asking themselves one key question: could the research methods in this section be expected to generate data to answer the research question(s) posed earlier? This was particularly true in the centre where all candidates chose the same research methodology.

Recommendations

Centres are recommended to:

Encourage a group of candidates to choose a variety of research methodologies rather than expecting them to make a project fit the one taught in class. Research is after all about knowledge exchange and transfer and a variety of projects shared in a cohort will broaden opportunities for learning.

Encourage candidates to provide full reference lists not just the work cited in the study but key sources associated with their area of research too. On this occasion the reference list at Appendix 1 is a part of the assessment so it is acceptable to include source material that has not actually been cited in the body of the work. A word of warning though, reference list 'padding' should be avoided – these should be key or landmark studies connected to the area of research.

Remind candidates that judicious use of quotations is a mark of scholarly endeavour. Good evidence of reading and research can be demonstrated using paraphrasing rather than direct quotation.

Remind candidates that the examiners are looking for *knowledge* and *understanding* of the ethical considerations of the proposed research project and how participants' rights will be safeguarded.

Avoid the use of writing frames (other than the AIM Awards template) and other sources of support not allowed under JCQ to minimise **risk of candidate disqualification**.

Be aware of the level of support offered to candidates to maintain the integrity of the Level 5 qualification (year 2 of degree level studies). One to one tutorial support and peer evaluation of projects (e.g. through class presentations) as well as verbal comments on parts of a draft are acceptable. Detailed feedback comments and amendments through track changes in Word (or equivalent) is NOT!