



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**SOCIOLOGY
A LEVEL**

SUMMER 2019

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COMPONENT 1: SOCIALISATION AND CULTURE

General Comments

The examining team were, on the whole, satisfied with the standards achieved in this series of examinations. Indeed, standards achieved by some candidates were exceptional and teachers and centres should be congratulated on the quality achieved.

The majority of candidates were able to demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of the topics covered. The very best answers demonstrated the higher order skills of analysis and evaluation most effectively.

There were however some very brief responses to essay questions and where this was the case it had a significant impact on the total mark for the paper.

When constructing discussions, the best candidates made good use of empirical evidence and contemporary debates. Many essays were well structured, logical and focussed.

Centres are advised to remind candidates to take careful note of command words so that they respond appropriately in their answers. Where an assessment is required the answer should not be descriptive in tone.

The level of English was, on the whole, acceptable.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Compulsory section A

Q.1 (a) Good candidates were able to fully define status including the dimension of how individuals and groups are perceived by others in society though many described the term as an individual's position in society.

Some candidates added more AO1 by referring to ascribed and achieved status. The strongest candidates alluded to people having more than one status dependent upon their role providing good examples from within and beyond the item. Many good answers failed to achieve full marks because they did not use the item or merely copied from it directly.

- Q.1 (b)** Centres are advised to take careful note of this report and of previous reports to ensure that candidates understand the requirements of this question.

The majority of candidates were able to identify two or more agents of socialisation and most focused on the process as the task required. These candidates were therefore, able to access band 4 marks. Most candidates wrote about family, peer groups or education. Good answers included concepts such as canalisation, manipulation, verbal appellations, imitation, sanctions, role modelling and peer pressure, showing a clear understanding of how these agents of socialisation teach social roles. However, a significant minority failed to do so. Those who identified 'media' gave good answers, choosing to write about processes such as role modelling, imitation and the hypodermic syringe model. However, those who chose 'religion' rarely focused on how roles are learned. Where candidates referred to more than one process whilst talking about one of the agents of socialisation and also had process in the other agent they could access the full range of marks for AO1. Candidates who talked in general terms about what socialisation is rather than how it happens were precluded from higher mark bands. Centres new to the specification should take note of this important point.

Section B

Option 1 Families and Households

- Q.2 (a)** There were some excellent answers to this very accessible question. The best answers showed a sound knowledge and understanding of the reasons why marriage rates have changed. However, a significant number of candidates failed to offer evidence to support their reasons and where evidence was used they often failed to explain what the evidence showed in relation to marriage rates. Where candidates failed to access the higher mark bands it was often the result of their failure to explain the reasons offered. The best answers offered three or more reasons which were explained with some supporting sociological evidence and/ or examples.

Weaker candidates offered largely anecdotal reasons rather than sociological ones. Some answers were either very lengthy or very brief; teachers would be wise to offer advice on timing so that candidates do not waste time on lower mark questions.

- Q.2 (b)** This was by far the more popular of the two question options. The feminist position was rightly seen as the focus of the question although few candidates made clear distinctions between the various feminist positions. A few stronger candidates were able to discuss the relationship of Capitalism to male dominance within the family citing the work of Ansley, Benston and Zaretsky but most saw feminists as a homogenous group who all perceive the family to be patriarchal. Radical feminists such as Millet and Greer were cited in evidence of patriarchal control and Duncombe and Marsden's triple shift featured in evidence of the unequal domestic division of labour alongside Oakley Hardill and Edgell regarding decision making. Few candidates evaluated the view citing that greater symmetry was occurring and if they did it was in the context of women's greater choices and their ability to seek alternative living arrangements if they wish to escape patriarchy. Most evaluated the feminist position against functionalism and the claim the gender inequality is functional and beneficial, the warm bath benefitting both sexes as instrumental and expressive leaders pursue their respective roles.

There were a significant number of weak answers in which it was evident that candidates did not understand the focus of the debate. The best answers accurately identified the view in the question and focussed on outlining, analysing and evaluating it. Answers that merely wrote descriptive accounts of theories of family did not score highly in AO2. Centres should be advised that a significant number of candidates were unable to construct effective discussions. There was often a distinct lack of evidence to support or reject ideas and as a result candidates failed to secure high level marks for either AO2 or AO3. A number of candidates seemed to struggle with high level analysis and evaluation and centres should be aware of the importance of these skills. Descriptive accounts of opposing theories do not allow candidates to achieve high marks for AO3. A significant number of candidates presented essays that were almost entirely one sided, arguing for the view in the question rather than debating it as the command words required. So, there were a significant number of essays that presented the case for families being patriarchal institutions rather than entering into a well-supported debate examining whether they are.

Nevertheless, there were some excellent well-crafted responses. Which were a pleasure to read.

Q.2 (c) This was the less popular of the two questions on Family and Households and there were some weak responses. Again the failure to engage in a debate was the biggest issue. The essay should have engaged candidates in examining ideas and evidence showing that extended families are becoming less important and those that suggest they are just as important if not more so. Instead, many essays presented accounts of the demise of the horizontally extended family using very dated material and ideas. There were so many opportunities to engage in a contemporary debate about family structures in the contemporary UK.

Q.3 (a) There were some very good responses to this question and many candidates were very highly rewarded for their precise and detailed knowledge and understanding of the relationship between gender and youth cultures. However there were also a significant number of candidates who demonstrated very tentative knowledge and even less understanding and as a result failed to access the higher mark bands. The link between gender and youth cultures was not always made explicit. Many candidates talked about the exclusivity of male subcultures or referred to MacRobbie on bedroom culture. A few better responses highlighted growing reference to females in the literature through the work of Jackson and Thornton. The predominance of males in relation to the malestream nature of the discipline was not mentioned by many candidates and surprisingly few candidates highlighted more the assertive femininity described in recent accounts of young women in gangs or recently reformed pop groups.

As with the Family option, some candidates cited reasons for the relationship but failed to support these with evidence or to explain them and this was reflected in their AO2 mark. On the other hand there were a significant number of well-crafted well-supported answers, demonstrating excellent knowledge and understanding.

- Q.3 (b)** The least popular of the two question options. Knowledge of this area was very limited with a few candidates highlighting resistance and rebellion referring to Teddy boys as working class rebels opposing gentrification and immigration or hippies opposing consumerism and middle class destinations. Little reference was made to changes in the economy and their impact on the development of youth subcultures.

Where students failed to score highly this was, unsurprisingly the result of weak higher order skills. Teachers are advised to focus on essay writing skills and in particular, the ability to demonstrate high level analysis and evaluation as this will enable students to access the highest marks. Many students were unsure of the impact that changes in the economy may have had on youth cultures and where this was the case, answers were often anecdotal and lacking in sociological knowledge and rigor.

- Q.3 (c)** Although the more popular question option, answers were generally of poor quality. A few answers which focused on the question referred to labelling and moral panics or media amplification and the role of the popular press. Anti -school subcultures also featured. A minority of candidates presented well informed, well supported discussions including contemporary evidence and examples but these were rare.

Section C
Option 1 Education
Compulsory question

- Q.4 (a)** This was answered quite well by many candidates. The best answers presented different theoretical ideas about the ways that schools prepare children for the workplace with most focussing on Functionalist and Marxist ideas. Some candidates had not been appropriately prepared for the examination because they were clearly confused about the success criteria. It was not necessary to have a debate though this was not penalised. AO1 and AO2 marks were at stake here so there was no requirement to evaluate the ideas presented. Many candidates failed to present sociological ideas but instead presented anecdotal and common sense ideas about how schools prepare children for work.
- Q.4 (b)** This was a popular question but it was not answered equally effectively by all candidates. The better answers engaged in a debate examining functionalist ideas about meritocracy and equal opportunities. These answers utilised evidence effectively as platforms for evaluative commentary on the view. However, a significant number of candidates presented one sided, descriptive essays and as such they were unable to access the higher mark bands.
- Q.4 (c)** This was a slightly less popular question. Yet again the command word was not embraced or understood, resulting in descriptive accounts of cultural deprivation theory and cultural capital; this was not the task. Assessing the impact of such factors required an evaluative examination of each perspective set against other factors such as labelling and material deprivation in order to examine the impact of cultural factors. Few candidates approached the essay in this way.

Option 2 Media

Compulsory question

- Q.5 (a)** This question was not answered well by many candidates. Simplistic accounts of the representation of youth as deviant particularly since the 50s were contrasted with the earlier representations in the post-war period which painted a much more rosey picture. Older people were generally discussed in the context of negative representations illustrated through common sense based examples from popular television to include overrepresentation in soaps or as stereotyped characters who are grumpy and dependent. The media was taken to mean mainstream television very little discussion was made of the impact of new media in relation to age, growing recognition of the elderly as consumers, the grey pound etc. Many stereotypical ideas about age were evident in answers to this question.
- Q.5 (b)** This was a popular and eminently accessible question. However, a significant number of candidates failed to focus on ownership and control and instead presented generic and descriptive accounts of media effects. Those who did examine ownership and control mostly presented fairly dated examples and undeveloped debate. Opportunities to challenge notions of power and control with reference to new media were not always utilised. On the other hand, those who answered this well answered it very well.
- Q.5 (c)** This was a slightly less popular question and in many cases answers were anecdotal. Opportunities to examine contemporary issues relating to the power of the media to influence behaviour were not seized upon. Little discussion of the various media effects models was presented and fairly common sense accounts were given of copycat violence illustrated through the Columbine high school massacre and the Jamie Bulger murder, citing computer games and video nasties as evidence of the direct relationship between media violence and real violence. The Bobo doll experiment was simplistically discussed in some responses to support this position. Some candidates also referred to catharsis as an outcome of viewing violent media and the possibility that this could indeed reduce violence in society. There was little or no recognition of the complexity of the debate.

Option 3 Religion

Compulsory question

- Q.6 (a)** This was by far the least popular option and this question was answered quite well. Many candidates presented well informed explanations of the relationship between religion and age which were supported in the best examples, by contemporary evidence.
- Q.6 (b)** This was a popular essay and most candidates presented fairly competent discussions regarding secularisation. However, some candidates presented one sided accounts and as such were precluded from the higher mark bands. Opportunities to engage in contemporary discussions about religious alignment and commitment were not always seized upon.

Q.6 (c) Few candidates attempted this question but of those that did the responses were competent with most having sound understanding of Weber's ideas on the role of religion in society. The task, however, was once again misunderstood by some candidates whose knowledge was clearly well established. Many did not engage in a debate or an assessment of Weber but instead gave detailed accounts of what Weber said about religion. This meant that they did not access higher mark bands for the higher order skills.

Summary of key points

- Understand the skills
- Understand the weighting of marks and how much time to spend on each question
- Understand the command words
- Use evidence to improve the quality of essays

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COMPONENT 2: METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

General Comments

For Component 2: Methods of Sociological Enquiry there are two questions, with the first question having three parts. Candidates are required to answer both questions. Answers varied considerably from centre to centre in terms of how well-prepared candidates are to tackle the demands of the questions.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 (a) Where candidates were able to correctly define the meaning of the term 'focus groups' this question was on the whole well answered. However, many candidates were vague in their understanding of the term and failed to provide a definition, focusing instead on the type of data generated from focus groups and therefore losing AO1 marks. The best answers were able to give a clear definition, understanding that a focus group is a type of group interview where the researcher acts as a moderator/facilitator. These answers also used terms such as validity, verstehen and social desirability.

Some candidates failed to use the item and therefore lost AO2 marks. Many candidates simply copied the item instead of using it to show off additional knowledge, such as it being a way for the researcher to gain understanding of controversial issues in a non-threatening manner. Some candidates referred to other research that had used focus groups in their research rather than focusing on the item as instructed in the question. This is not required and there are no marks available for doing so. Candidates should be advised not to do this.

Q.1 (b) The key to answering this question is to contextualise the item and explain why the researchers in the item decided to use snowball sampling. Some candidates simply gave a definition of snowball sampling and why the use was good or bad, struggling to focus on the researcher in the item. The best answers were able to give a detailed reason that focused on the item, for example noting that the New Age Travellers were suspicious of outsiders and particularly researchers and therefore this type of sampling would have allowed for a building of trust between the researcher and the group. The best answers could say why this was more appropriate than other sampling methods. Some candidates wasted valuable time referring to other research. This seemed to be on a centre/s basis. There is no need to make reference to other sociological studies and in fact candidates often did it to the detriment of using the item and/or developing the possible reason they had identified. A few candidates identified more than one possible reason which usually meant both were undeveloped.

Q.1 (c) It is important candidates are made aware of the demands of this question as some students neglected to reference the item and others failed to refer to sociological studies, causing them to lose AO2 marks. This seemed to be a centre issue. Some candidates gave long winded introductions detailing different types of interviews, or a lengthy introduction explaining what they were going to do and a conclusion that simply repeated what they had already said. This is a waste of valuable time and candidates should be advised to be more succinct. The best answers were able to define unstructured interviews and give a balance of strengths and weaknesses using methodological language. Most candidates could identify strengths and weaknesses of unstructured interviews, but weaker answers often took a common-sense approach, failed to use terminology and were therefore not highly rewarded. Most candidates, for example, could highlight that unstructured interviews allow for participants to feel comfortable but then weaker candidates failed to consider how this impacts validity. The best answers were able to show understanding of the terms that they used whereas weaker answers would use terms almost randomly without showing understanding. An example of this is when students say 'this lacks validity and reliability' which shows no understanding and rather disappointingly was a regular occurrence. Many candidates highlighted that an issue with the data from unstructured interviews could be that it is affected by the Hawthorne effect, this seemed to be a centre issue and is incorrect.

Q.2 Candidates are advised to spend approximately half of the time available on this question. It is worth half of the marks. The marks are allocated on the basis of 8 for AO1 that is for the research design, 10 for the way in which they justify their design and a further 12 for the issues the design raises, that is the impact of the research design on the quality of the research. It is important that students contextualise the group they have been asked to study as well as the topic, in this case young boys and attitudes to education. In some cases, this was ignored, and answers were generic and rehearsed. It is important to note that the research design needs to be realistic for an A Level student and the best answers highlighted this explicitly. There are a number of key elements to a research design which candidates should be expected to address. These include:

1. Type of data. Most students started by stating what type of data they'd collect, and the best answers would state what approach they'd follow e.g. positivist or interpretivist and justify their choice in relation to what they want to find e.g. social facts or meanings and motives. Some candidates failed to specify one approach and chose multiple methods which often led to confusion when applying key terms and justifying their overall aim.
2. The operationalisation of the terms in the brief. Most candidates operationalised terms such as 'young boys', 'attitudes to education' and 'your area' with weaker candidates using the term 'measure' instead of explicitly referring to operationalisation. The operationalisation of the terms is crucial to research and candidates should be advised to think carefully about this e.g. some saw young boys as being 5-8, making their proposal unrealistic and ethically concerning! The best answers were able to explain why operationalising is important e.g. to reduce ambiguities but some failed to do this.

3. The sampling technique to be used. Some candidates overcomplicated this by using more than one sampling method. The best answers were able to state their sampling method and be specific in terms of numbers/location and then identify strengths and weaknesses with their choice. Some were inappropriate e.g. standing outside a primary school asking young boys to take part. Weaker candidates would simply state a sampling method but not elaborate on the specifics.
4. The research method. Some candidates used two or even three methods and thereby spent a long time describing each one. Candidates should be advised that they would find it generally easier if they chose one method and then justified it in relation to the type of data the method would enable them to collect and then used the key methodological concepts to consider the impact this would have on the quality of the research. Weaker candidates often used all the concepts in one sentence demonstrating their lack of knowledge and understanding e.g. 'valid and reliable'. Candidates should be reminded that they must think about the appropriateness of their chosen method.
5. Ethics. The majority of candidates did address ethics though some more cursorily than others. Some answers went through the motions and were rehearsed but this was generally done well.
6. Practical issues. Most candidates addressed practical issues of time and money. For the most part candidates referred to the fact that they were limited in their time and money due to their status as A level students. The best candidates thought about their chosen method and applied this to the group they were researching, e.g. if candidates chose interviews, they recognised a need for training, especially since they were researching children.
7. Key concepts. Apart from the points above candidates must be advised that they should know and understand the meaning of the key concepts and understand that it demonstrates a lack of understanding when they, for example, use validity and reliability in the same sentence as if they were somehow interchangeable.

As with question 1c, some candidates wasted time repeating themselves in a long-winded conclusion that discussed what they could have done if they had more time/money etc and should avoid this. Overall, some students had given the task considerable thought and really thought about the group they'd been asked to study while effectively talking about the methodological impact of their choices. These answers were highly rewarded.

Summary of key points

- Candidates should carefully consider what is required of them for each question/section and not waste valuable time.
- Candidates should consider fully the material they are presented with in the examination and seek to use this material to illustrate their knowledge and understanding.
- For this component, a thorough understanding of concepts should be demonstrated such as validity and reliability, some candidates consistently confuse terms and lose marks.

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COMPONENT 3: POWER AND STRATIFICATION

General Comments

The standard of preparation for the paper was generally very good. The paper appeared to be accessible to most candidates and there were few rubric errors. For the most part candidates allocated their time according to the marks available for each question. Section A has a compulsory question 1(a) followed by a choice of essay 1(b) or 1(c). There are 4 options in Section B and, as with last year, Option 1 Crime and Deviance was by far the most popular with the least popular being Health and Disability.

The majority of candidates completed the front cover of the answer booklet including identifying the questions they had done. There were however a notable number who did not. This caused examiners some additional work.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Question 1(a) asked candidates to identify evidence of age inequalities in two areas of social life. Age is one of the social characteristics referred to in the specification along with class, ethnicity and gender. The question explicitly asked the candidate to support their points with evidence. Many did this very well however some ignored that part of the question thereby they could not be placed in the higher mark bands.

Evidence needs to be specific and those candidates who said 'statistics show' without a citation could not be placed in the higher mark bands unless they included evidence that did have a citation. Many candidates had read the question carefully and supplied evidence of inequality and did not focus on difference. The latter attracted no marks. Marks available were, as identified on the SAMs, for AO1 and AO2. Most candidates this session had taken cognisance of the instruction in the second half of the question and did not evaluate the evidence they supplied.

See mark scheme for suggestions of evidence in a number of the more popular areas of social life chosen by candidates.

Questions 1(b)/1(c)

1(b) asked candidates to evaluate Weberian explanations of social inequality and many did this very well. Some however spent most of the essay describing Weber's theory and then added some evaluation at the end. All the essays on this paper require candidates to integrate evaluation in relation to the claims they are making therefore adding a few evaluative points at the end did not enable them to be placed in the higher mark bands for AO3.

The marks for all of the essays on the paper are divided as follows AO1 (14), AO2 (14) and AO3 (12).

Candidates who supported their claims with relevant evidence were rewarded appropriately. This applies to all of the essays on this paper.

1(c) Most Candidates who opted for this question had read it carefully and realised it was not a question on functionalism as a theory per se and therefore answered it accordingly.

Section B

As noted above the most popular option in this section was 1 – Crime and Deviance.

However there was comparability across the options.

In each option there was a compulsory question.

2(a)/3(a)/4(a) and 5(a) all required candidates to explain sociological evidence to support a view. Many candidates supplied a range of relevant evidence and were rewarded appropriately. As with 1(a) referring to statistics in a generalised way was not evidence and was not rewarded. In addition those candidates who evaluated the evidence they had identified were spending unnecessary time since there were no marks for evaluation.

As with past papers each of the four options had a choice of 2 essays. This year the choice in each was between evaluating a theory or assessing a view.

These essays required the candidates to write in a discursive style. To use evidence to support the claims they were making and to evaluate that claim and the evidence.

Those candidates who ensured they evaluated the claims as they made them in both a positive and a critical way were rewarded. However there were some candidates who either did not know or forgot to identify evidence to support their claims and therefore could not be placed in the higher mark bands for AO1. There are 14 marks for AO2 – that is for what they did with what they knew. Candidates who used link terms such as this means that or this is illustrated by and so forth found themselves automatically doing something with what they knew.

Summary of key points

- Candidates should spend some time reading the specific requirements of the question they are about to answer
- Candidates should allocate their time according to the mark allocation for each question
- It is important to cite evidence in all questions
- Candidates should ensure they evaluate all of the points they make
- Candidates should try to use contemporary evidence where appropriate.



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