



GCE A Level Examiners' Report

Sociology
A Level
Summer 2024

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.

Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner Eduqas

Contents

	Page
Executive summary	5
Component 1 – Socialisation and Culture	7
Component 2 – Methods of Sociological Enquiry	11
Component 3 – Power and Stratification	15
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	18

Executive Summary

The demands of the three components were comparable to previous series. Each component assessed all three assessment objectives utilising a range of short and extended response questions.

Component 1 focuses on socialisation and culture and includes three sections: Section A being compulsory and Sections B and C containing options from which candidates select one in each. The standard this year was mixed with fewer candidates demonstrating the highest levels of skills and knowledge. The paper was accessible and comparable to previous series. As in previous series, the most challenging questions for candidates were the essay questions. Here, to access the highest mark bands, candidates are required to demonstrate higher order skill of analysis and evaluation. Weaker candidates struggled to provide more than descriptive responses.

Some improvement was seen in the 15-mark questions in Section B with many candidates providing supported, relevant responses in both Families and Households and Youth Cultures. A key area for development is AO3 skills to enable candidates to maintain a discursive and evaluative tone in the essay questions.

Component 2 assesses Methods of Sociological Enquiry and again the paper was comparable to previous series in terms of challenge and accessibility, with nearly all candidates attempting all four compulsory questions. The examining team noted some improvement in exam technique compared to 2023, notably on question 1.3 where more candidates utilised the item effectively to help explain ethical issues.

The strongest candidates were able to utilise appropriate methodological terminology effectively throughout and were also able to appropriately address the demands of each question including, where required, contextualising to the item and the use of relevant sociological research. For others, this is a key area of development to enable them to access higher mark bands.

Component 3 content focuses on Power and Stratification in a paper that contains two sections; Section A on social inequality is compulsory, and Section B provides a choice of four options and, as in previous series, Crime and Deviance continued to be the most popular by far. The paper consists of 20-mark questions, testing AO1 and AO2 skills, and 40-mark essay questions which assess all three assessment objectives, including AO3.

On the whole, the examining team was satisfied with the standards achieved in this series with an overall improved standard. Essays completed by some candidates were exceptional, a large number of responses were well structured, logical and focused and the majority of candidates were able to demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of the topics covered. Performance on the 20-mark questions, compared to 2023, was improved across all Section B options and in Section A, where more candidates were able to utilise evidence effectively.

There continued to be a number of candidates who were unable to interpret the demands of the questions accurately and therefore failed to respond appropriately to the set command words.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Understand the demands of individual questions	OER website (online exam review) Exam walkthrough Component 1 Resource (edugas.co.uk)	Marked exemplars of past examination questions. Practical hints and tips on how to effectively approach questions in the examination paper
Effective use of sociological evidence	A level Feedback Summer 2023 (Secure Portal)	Recorded PL presentation. Advice and exemplars can be adapted for use in the classroom
Development of AO3 skills	Evaluate Concept Map Thinking Tools (wjec.co.uk)	A 'Thinking Tools' resource - a template to assist learners in constructing evaluative commentary

SOCIOLOGY

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 1 SOCIALISATION AND CULTURE

Overview of the Component

All AOs are assessed across the examination. Lower tariff questions allow students to access AO1 and AO2 marks whilst higher tariff questions allow access to all three AOs. The focus of this unit is culture and specifically how we acquire culture.

The demands of the 2024 paper were comparable to 2023 and candidates were able to access the full range of questions and topics. The vast majority of candidates were attempted the compulsory section A. The Family remained the most popular option in section B and Education was by far the most popular option in Section C.

The examining team encountered a mix of responses and fewer candidates were able to demonstrate the highest levels of skills and knowledge. The most challenging questions, as in previous series, were the essays. To access the highest mark bands candidates are required to demonstrate higher order skills and analysis and evaluation. This was not always done well, and weaker candidates struggled to provide more than basic or limited descriptive responses. A key area for development is AO3 skills to enable candidates to maintain a discursive and evaluative tone in the essay questions.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A - Compulsory

- Q.1** **(a)** Most candidates were able to score 3 marks or more for this question. Those who failed to score full marks either, failed to offer a clear definition of the term, did not use the item, or both.
- (b)** Most candidates were able to identify at least two agents of socialisation and most focused on the process of socialisation as the task required. These candidates were, therefore, able to access band 4 marks. Most candidates wrote about family, peer groups or education. The best answers referred to processes such as canalisation, manipulation, verbal appellations, imitation, sanctions, role modelling and peer pressure, showing a clear understanding of how these agents of socialisation help people to learn culture. However, a significant minority failed to explain how agents do so. Some candidates conflated education and peer group so that processes described lacked clarity.

Where candidates referred to more than one process in one agent of socialisation and also referred to a process in the other agent, this allowed 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 obtaining any more than 5 marks for AO1.

Section B

Some improvement was seen in the 15-mark questions in Section B with a number of candidates providing supported, relevant responses in Families and Households and more so in Youth Cultures.

Option 1 Families and Households

2.1 Many candidates were able to offer at least two reasons for the increase in singlehood. However, a significant number referred to dated evidence to support reasons such as the changing expectations of women and some offered no evidence at all. Some got confused and wrote answers about co-habitation or single parents.

2.2 and 2.3 Essays in this component assess the candidate's ability to present well supported discussions on sociological topics.

Both essay choices in this option were popular. Some responses were detailed whilst others were basic. To access the highest mark bands candidates need to demonstrate detailed understanding of the debate with reference to key theories/writers and evidence. The best essays maintained an evaluative tone throughout and were clearly focussed on the debate in question. Descriptive accounts of different ideas were not rewarded with high marks for AO3.

In the 2.3 essay there were opportunities to utilise evidence to support lines of discussion, but few candidates capitalised on this. For example, evidence of gender inequalities in family life could have been utilised to support feminist ideas about whether families need fathers. Where candidates did utilise evidence to enrich and develop ideas, they were more likely to achieve high marks.

Option 2 Youth Cultures

3.1 The success criteria for this question are the same as that for 2.1. Many candidates offered accurate, supported, and well thought out responses to this question. However, some failed to access the higher mark bands because their ideas were less sociological, more anecdotal, and consequently not supported with references to evidence.

3.2 and 3.3 These essays are assessed in the same way as all the essays on the paper. The spread of marks across the three skill domains is the same.

Both essay options were popular, and both generated a range of responses. The best responses, as in the Families and Households option, were those that demonstrated detailed, wide ranging sociological ideas which were then critically evaluated. Descriptive accounts did not achieve high marks for AO3.

Section C

Option 1 Education

This was by far the most popular option in Section C of the paper.

4.1 This was an accessible question. However, there was a great deal of difference in the quality of responses. The focus of the response should have been material deprivation, for which there is considerable evidence. Candidates could have outlined how material deprivation can affect a range of factors such as catchment area school, access to private education, choices about higher education and so on. Many candidates offered well informed and well supported responses but some confused material with cultural factors. Whilst there is arguably a connection between these factors the question specified poverty so responses which referred to cultural factors required careful and sophisticated explanation by the candidate. Some did this very well and were appropriately rewarded but some drifted into irrelevant and often anecdotal descriptions.

4.2 and 4.3 4.2 was a more popular choice in this option. Many candidates failed to engage in a debate about inside school factors versus outside school factors affecting attainment in education. This resulted in a one-sided essay lacking in discussion and this consequently impacted on the AO3 mark. In short, candidates failed to focus on the command “discuss” and instead wrote essays describing how inside school factors do affect attainment.

Similarly, in the 4.3 essay there were opportunities for sophisticated reflections on the view that education appropriately prepares young people for work. However, we saw few examples of this. Responses were, for the most part, descriptions of the functionalist followed by the Marxist views on this issue. Where this was the case, candidates were unlikely to access the higher mark bands for AO3.

Option 2 Media

Fewer centres had studied the Media option. There was a range of responses.

5.1 Although age is in the specification, it was clear that some candidates were ill prepared for this question. Nevertheless, many were able to utilise their knowledge to best effect and were rewarded with good marks. There was a more significant divide in the marks awarded in this question between those who offered detailed responses and those who offered basic anecdotal responses.

5.2 and 5.3 Both essay options were popular. The success criteria are the same in these essays as for all essays on the paper. So, candidates who presented accurate, relevant, detailed, wide-ranging ideas which were well supported and evaluated were rewarded with high marks in all three skills. Where essays had a descriptive tone access to the highest mark band for AO3 was more difficult. In 5.3 the marking team noted that some candidates referred to owners as media professionals which often caused them to develop a less relevant line of discussion. In 5.2 there were some non-sociological, anecdotal examples of how the media can influence audiences.

Option 3 Religion

Very few centres studied this option.

- 6.1** This question generated a range of responses from very detailed to very limited. Responses that were rewarded high marks presented at least two reasons which were supported with evidence.
- 6.2 and 6.3** There were responses to both essay options. The success criteria are the same in these essays as for all essays on the paper. So, candidates who presented accurate, relevant, detailed, wide-ranging ideas which were well supported and evaluated were rewarded with high marks in all three skills. Where essays had a descriptive tone access to the highest mark band for AO3 was more difficult.

SOCIOLOGY

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 2 METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

Overview of the Component

This component assesses Methods of Sociological Enquiry, and all three AOs are assessed across the paper. The paper was comparable to previous series in terms of challenge and accessibility, with nearly all candidates attempting all four compulsory questions. The examining team noted some improvement in exam technique compared to 2023, notably on question 1.3 where more candidates utilised the item effectively to help explain ethical issues. The ability to apply knowledge, analysis and evaluation to the context of the research design in question 2 is important.

The strongest candidates were able to utilise appropriate methodological terminology effectively throughout and were also able to appropriately address the demands of each question including, where required, contextualising to the item and the use of relevant sociological research. For others, this is a key area of development to enable them to access higher mark bands.

Comments on individual questions/sections

1.1 Top band answers could:

- define the term observation, explaining the different types as well as use methodological language associated with observations such as verstehen, ethnography, validity and Hawthorne effect.
- recognise that observations data are preferred by interpretivists, and the best answers could explain why this is the case.
- use the item in a meaningful way e.g. use the item as a springboard to show off additional knowledge.

Some candidates failed to use the item and therefore lost AO2 marks. Many candidates simply copied the item instead of using it as an opportunity to show off additional knowledge. A significant number of candidates referred to other research which isn't required and meant that candidates didn't have time to refer to the item in any depth.

1.2 Top band answers could:

- state one reason and explain using methodological language
- contextualise the item (this is why there are more marks for AO2 than the previous 5-mark question) and explain why the researchers in the item decided to use qualitative methods. Some candidates simply defined qualitative without contextualising to the people or topic in the item.

As with the previous question some candidates wasted valuable time by referring to other research. There is no need to make reference to other sociological studies and in fact candidates often did so 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. Going forward candidates should be advised to start their answers with 'the reason why (the people in the item) Hussain and Collins used qualitative data is.... and then go on to show understanding of methodological language while linking to the research conducted in the item.

1.3 This question was answered well and there was an improvement in terms of meeting the demands of the question as most candidate effectively used the item to help explain ethical issues. Top band answers could:

- describe and explain 4-5 ethical issues and their impact on the quality of the data researchers can obtain e.g. deception as a way of improving validity.
- refer to at least 2 studies to illustrate their issues being discussed.

Some candidates failed to refer to studies in order to back up the examples of ethical issues and therefore couldn't achieve marks above the basic band. Some candidates have been trained to use mnemonics such as Practical, Ethical and Theoretical issues which meant that their answers lost focus or were confused.

2.1 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 in relation to the brief and being an A Level student and a further 12 for the methodological issues the design raises, that is the impact of the research design on the quality of the research.

The best answers really thought about climate change and contextualised the topic at each stage, and continually linked back to being an A level student and the limitations that created, thereby justifying their decision-making throughout. Weaker answers were more generic and went through the motions. Basic answers simply listed what they would do without explaining why it was important. Some candidates started off doing a positivist closed questionnaire but then undermined their approach by including focus groups or interviews to rectify some problems making the research less feasible as an A Level student. There are a number of key elements to a research design which candidates are expected to address.

These include:

1. Type of data.

Most students started by stating what type of data they would collect, and the best answers would state what approach they would 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. Similarly, candidates would talk about the importance of a literature review but in a generic way that could be added to any scenario rather than contextualising to the brief.

2. The operationalisation of the terms in the brief.

This stage is listed in the mark scheme, but some candidates failed to mention the operationalisation of concepts and therefore couldn't get in the detailed band for AO1. Most candidates operationalised terms such as 'age, and 'area' and the strongest answers thought about climate change in relation to attitudes either by quantifying and using Likert scales or by using qualitative methods to explore positive or negative attitudes. The best answers were able to explain why operationalising is important e.g. to reduce ambiguities/improve reliability but some failed to do this. Weaker candidates hinted at measuring concepts/terms rather than mentioning operationalisation explicitly.

3. The sampling technique to be used.

Most candidates used appropriate methods for A Level students such as opportunity or volunteer (even using QR codes for tech savvy young people) and were able to reflect on the limitations in terms of generalisability and bias. Some candidates used random sampling without mentioning how they would obtain a sampling frame. The best answers were able to state their sampling method and be specific in terms of numbers/location and then identify strengths and weaknesses of their choice. Weaker candidates would simply state a sampling method but not elaborate on the specifics.

4. Method.

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. Many started off adopting a positivist approach but would then add a few open questions to rectify some of the weaknesses of their research, but this would often contradict/undermine their initial justification of their approach. Weaker candidates often used all the concepts in one sentence demonstrating their lack of knowledge and understanding e.g. 'valid and reliable'. The best answers were specific in what they would do and had a balance of strengths and weaknesses/problems using methodological language.

5. Ethics.

Most 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. The best answers linked to problems with sensitivity in relation to fear of the future in relation to climate change and how this may cause anxiety.

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.

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.

Overall, 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.

SOCIOLOGY

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 3 POWER AND STRATIFICATION

Overview of the Component

Component 3 content focuses on Power and Stratification in a paper that contains two sections; Section A on social inequality is compulsory, and Section B provides a choice of four options and, as in previous series, Crime and Deviance continued to be the most popular by far. The paper consists of 20-mark questions, testing AO1 and AO2 skills, and 40-mark essay questions which assess all three assessment objectives, including AO3. The demands and accessibility of the 2024 paper were again comparable to those in 2023.

The examining team were generally satisfied with the standards achieved. Essays completed by some candidates were exceptional, effectively demonstrating the higher order skills of analysis and evaluation and were well structured, logical and focussed. Most candidates were able to demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of the topics covered. However, there are still a number of students who are unable to read and interpret the demands of questions accurately, limiting their overall marks. 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.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

- 1.1** 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 preventing access to 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 which is an improvement on previous series. Answers that focused on difference attracted few marks.
- 1.2** This was a popular question. Many candidates were familiar with the different functionalist explanations of inequalities and explained these well. Some students focused purely on inequalities of education which limited their marks for AO1 and AO2 as students should identify a broad range of inequalities. AO3 marks were awarded where candidates evaluated functionalism against other theories.

- 1.3** This was less popular than 1.2. Those candidates who did choose this option were able to give accurate descriptions of social class or Marxist explanations of social inequality with varying levels of detail. The examining team agreed that other interpretations of the question would be allowed but the skills descriptors, remained the same. Most candidates examined social class inequalities in different areas of life but focused on crime/education and so on. Some answers did examine whether social class was the major determinant, and some did examine Marxist ideas against other theories, which were also accepted. AO3 marks were awarded where candidates either evaluated functionalism against other theories or other aspects of CAGE, however, many were juxtaposed.

Section B

Option 1 Crime and Deviance

- 2.1** This question was answered well on the whole. The majority of students gave a wide range of reasons and supported with evidence. Were students underperformed in AO1 they focused purely on one sociological reason why statistics may not be accurate, for example only white-collar crime or only feminist explanations.
- 2.2** There were some very well written answers to this question where students used a range of interactionist explanations and evaluated these with other sociological explanations and theories. Some candidates focused purely on labelling and spent time writing about labelling in education without making any connections to crime and deviance. Centres are referred to the mark scheme which could be used with students who have been set this question to ensure a range of interactionist explanations are addressed.
- 2.3** Although the less popular question some who answered it did so well. However, some purely debated left and right realism and failed to focus on the solutions as required by the question.

Option 2 Health and disability

- 3.1** Few candidates answered this option and of those who did, responses were either very good or very weak. Some candidates offered no sociological evidence, reflecting a lack of knowledge and understanding.
- 3.2** Very few candidates answered this question. Whilst cultural factors clearly do lead to inequalities in health, other factors should have been examined so that the extent of the role cultural factors play could be determined.
- 3.3** This question was answered well by those who opted for it, however some focused broadly on functionalism rather than the specifics of the question, namely the role of medical professionals.

Option 3 Power and Politics

- 4.1** Few candidates answered this option and of those who did, responses very weak. Most candidates offered no sociological evidence, reflecting a lack of knowledge and understanding.
- 4.2** Most candidates had been well prepared for this question, and they were able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in relation to relevant sociologists and theories of power in a detailed and wide-ranging way.
- 4.3** Too few answered this question for any patterns to be determined. The quality of answers varied.

Option 3 World

- 5.1** There was evidence that some candidates had a detailed knowledge and understanding of why some sociologists argue that urbanisation is linked to poverty. Candidates were rewarded if they identified those sociologists who do argue that urbanisation is linked to poverty. Others provided limited evidence on urbanisation, citing mostly anecdotal examples. Those that provided generalised arguments were not able to access the higher mark bands
- 5.2** Some candidates were able to discuss the influence of world systems. Some did it in a rather narrow way by simply addressing the economic influence rather than social, cultural and environmental influences. Some candidates drifted into an essay on globalisation and, whilst it is relevant, if this was the only content of the answer, it meant they drifted away from the focus of the question. Many candidate responses were juxtaposed often noting everything they knew about world systems theory, then dependency theory, then modernisation theory and a few tackled neo-liberalism. This restricted AO3 marks.
- 5.3** This was the more popular question in this option, and some answered it very well being able to discuss gender inequality in relation to theoretical perspectives. Answers to this question often contained accurate descriptions of why women are treated less favourably and/or what feminists say about LEDCs. As with other essays, the evaluation of these ideas was less well executed than the description of them and this resulted in lower AO3 marks. Supporting or critical evidence was utilised by some and where this was the case, the debate was significantly enhanced. The use of evidence to support or refute a view provides an excellent vehicle for the demonstration of higher order skills and is found in the best essays.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 02922 404279

Email: GCESociology@edugas.co.uk

Qualification webpage: [AS and A Level Sociology | Edugas](#)

See other useful contacts here: [Useful Contacts | Edugas](#)

CPD Training / Professional Learning

Access our popular, free online CPD/PL courses to receive exam feedback and put questions to our subject team, and attend one of our face-to-face events, focused on enhancing teaching and learning, providing practical classroom ideas and developing understanding of marking and assessment.

Please find details for all our courses here: <https://www.edugas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/>

Regional Rep Team

Our regional team covers all areas of England and can provide face-to-face and online advice at a time which is convenient to you.

Get in contact today and discover how our team can support you and your students.

[Regional Support Team | Edugas](#)

Edugas Qualifications

We are one of the largest providers of qualifications for schools, academies, sixth form and further education colleges across England, offering valued qualifications to suit a range of abilities. Each and every one of our qualifications is carefully designed to engage students and to equip them for the next stage of their lives.

We support our education communities by providing trusted qualifications and specialist support, to allow our students the opportunity to reach their full potential.



WJEC
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX
Tel No 029 2026 5000
Fax 029 2057 5994
E-mail: exams@wjec.co.uk
website: www.wjec.co.uk