



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**SOCIOLOGY
A LEVEL**

SUMMER 2022

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SOCIOLOGY

GCE A LEVEL

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COMPONENT 1 - SOCIALISATION AND CULTURE

General Comments

The examining team was, 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.

However, there was a marked deterioration in the standard of some scripts. This is likely to be linked to the disruption in teaching and contact time as a result of the pandemic. There were 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.

Nevertheless, 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.

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

1.1 Most candidates were able to demonstrate some knowledge of the meaning of norms. However, a significant number were unsure and offered very generalised definitions with weak examples. Many failed to utilise the item for their answer. As a result, a significant number of candidates failed to score full marks for this question.

1.2 Centres are advised to take careful note of this report and of previous reports to ensure that candidates understand the requirements of this question.

There were many very accomplished responses to this question demonstrating sound knowledge and understanding of the process of socialisation. However, examiners reported that a number of candidates wrote in very general terms about what socialisation is rather than how it happens. Examiners reported that a number of candidates were unclear about the process of socialisation and this, unsurprisingly, had a negative impact on their answers. Candidates did not always talk about role models, sanctions and so on and relied on generic descriptions of what socialisation is. Candidates did not always use the item effectively to illustrate their answer and some made no reference to it at all. Examples to illustrate understanding were often very weak.

Section B

Option 1 Families and Households

- 2.1** There were some excellent answers to this question. The best answers showed a sound knowledge and understanding of the reasons why cohabitation has increased. However, a significant number of candidates failed to offer evidence to support their reasons and neither did they explain what the evidence showed where evidence was used. 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.

- 2.2** This was a popular choice. Many candidates were able to present ideas and evidence focussing on the role of grandparents in relation to the importance of extended families. Few were able to cite studies relating to this. Most responses to this question failed to utilise contemporary research evidence; instead they relied on rather dated rehearsed material which was not as appropriate as it could have been. Indeed, studies conducted in the 1950s and 60s were cited as evidence of the importance of extended families, even though the question stipulated “contemporary society”. The best answers considered the debate; extended families alongside a range of different types and how social change has created new types of extended families.
- 2.3** This was also a popular choice and it presented the opportunity for candidates to demonstrate wide ranging knowledge of different feminist ideas. However, most candidates offered generalised and undeveloped accounts of what feminists say without considering the pros and cons of their ideas as the question demanded. The command word evaluate was key. Many students interpreted this as describe and as a result their AO2 and AO3 marks were affected. Nevertheless, there were some excellent well-crafted responses demonstrating range and detail.

Option 2 Youth Culture

- 3.1** 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 social class and membership of 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. As with the Family option, some candidates cited reasons for the relationship but failed to explain them and this was reflected in their AO2 mark.
- 3.2** In general, this essay was reasonably well attempted and there were some very good answers. The question allowed students to utilise a wide range of knowledge and on the whole the quality of answers was good. 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 candidates presented dated studies and theories which focused on females being invisible in the past. The ones who were able to consider this in the context of the debate were able to present sophisticated lines of discussion; perhaps they aren't more involved just more visible.

- 3.3** This was an accessible question which asked candidates to consider the value of functionalist ideas about the role of youth culture. Most were able to present accurate accounts of functionalist and opposing ideas but often in a descriptive rather than discursive way. Once again the command word evaluate wasn't fully embraced or understood.

Section C

Option 1 Education

Compulsory question

- 4.1** Answers to this question were , on the whole, disappointing. Many answers examined attainment rather than subject choice. The changing role of females was an obvious choice as a reason but this was not explained clearly. Studies of classroom interaction could have been utilised to support the notion of stereotyping. It appeared that candidates were challenged by the need to apply ideas and evidence from across their study of the sociology of education. The ability to select appropriate reasons and support them with evidence was lacking in many answers.
- 4.2** This was a popular question and many candidates answered it well. The best answers did not merely list what functionalists say, they challenged the ideas with reference to alternatives. However, because it was necessary to consider alternative ideas, many candidates lost the focus on functionalism and the essay became a descriptive account of theories and theorists. This often resulted in a juxtaposed essay which adversely affected their AO3 mark. Where evaluation is merely a descriptive account of alternative ideas, the AO3 mark is likely to be towards the bottom of band 3.
- 4.3** This was also a popular question. It was answered well by some candidates but many candidates failed to focus on cultural factors in their essay. Very few candidates utilised empirical evidence and this meant that they were not able to access the highest mark bands. The best answers examined a range of possible explanations for the differences in educational outcome, assessing the value of each as the question demanded. A significant number of candidates confused cultural factors with material factors. Many presented assertive ideas about "poor culture" and very few considered Bourdieu, Sullivan or Reay who were important in this debate. Weaker answers listed different explanations but failed to assess them which meant that they might be able to access a reasonable mark for AO1 but AO2 and AO3 skills marks were lower.

Media

- 5.1** A less popular option. There were some competent answers although supporting evidence and examples were often quite basic. Where this was the case, the mark awarded reflected this. The command "using sociological evidence" is often ignored.
- 5.2.** The answers that we saw in response to this question were mixed. Some were very good and others very weak. There anecdotal accounts rather than theoretical ones and many candidates had a tentative grasp of different theories of media effects. This was surprising and disappointing.
- 5.3** This was a less popular choice in this option and once again, answers were mixed. Some took the opportunity to examine in detail, Marxist and pluralist ideas about ownership and control. However, few interrogated them, instead offered a descriptive account of what they say.

Religion

- 6.1** A much less popular option. There were some competent answers although supporting evidence and examples were often quite absent, basic, or missing. Where this was the case, the mark awarded reflected this. The command “using sociological evidence” was often ignored.
- 6.2** The answers that we saw in response to this question were mixed. Some were very good and others very weak. There anecdotal accounts rather than theoretical ones and many candidates had a tentative grasp of different theories. This was surprising and disappointing.
- 6.3** As with 6.2 the answers that we saw in response to this question were mixed. Some were very good and others very weak. There anecdotal accounts rather than theoretical ones and many candidates had a tentative grasp of different theories. This was once more, surprising and disappointing.

Summary of key points

The Examination Team would like to thank centres for their efforts and hard work in preparing candidates for this examination. Exemplar material will be made available in the Autumn term.

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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.1.1** The best answers were able to give a clear definition, understand that a questionnaire can be both open and closed and use methodological language. 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. 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.
- Q.1.2** The key to answering this question is to contextualise the item and explain why the researchers in the item decided to use both quantitative and qualitative methods. Some candidates simply defined quantitative and qualitative data without focussing on methods and ignoring the reason why researchers might want to use both e.g. to get a holistic view or to compensate the weaknesses of each approach. The best answers were able to give a detailed reason that focused on the research in the item. 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.1.3** It is important candidates are made aware of the demands of this question as some students neglected to reference the item causing them to lose AO2 marks and others failed to refer to sociological studies and therefore lowering the AO1 mark. This seemed to be a centre issue. Despite being on the specification, very few candidates were able to define longitudinal studies, recognise different types (quantitative and qualitative) and refer to studies that are longitudinal. Many focussed on the long aspect of the term and referred to studies that took a long time such as Venkatesh rather than ones that revisit the same sample, at regular intervals over a long period of time. Therefore, understanding was implicit and came under band 2. Despite this there were candidates who were able to use research from quantitative examples e.g. cohort studies, as well as qualitative examples such as the Up Series or child of our time. Students were rewarded for using language that is associated with longitudinal studies e.g. more than a 'snapshot' or 'sample attrition'

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.

Many lower achieving candidates seemed to have pre planned responses but had failed to contextualise their response to the age group and topic of healthy eating. The best responses discussed age of participants and consent / needing parental consent as well as the associated sensitivities of healthy eating research such as eating disorders and body image. The strongest responses were in context for every stage of the research design, and continually linked back to being an A level student and the limitations that gave, thereby justifying their decision making throughout. Weaker answers simply listed what they would do without explaining why it was important. 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 'healthy eating', 'young people' and 'area' with weaker candidates using the term 'measure' instead of explicitly referring to operationalisation. 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. 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. 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 eating disorders and how this might impact validity/rapport.

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.

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COMPONENT 3 - POWER AND STRATIFICATION

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.

However, there was a marked deterioration in the standard of some scripts. This is likely to be linked to the disruption in teaching and contact time as a result of the pandemic. There were 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.

Nevertheless, 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.

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

- 1.1** Most candidates were able to offer examples of gender inequality from two areas of life. It was evident that some centres had misunderstood the task as answers lacked actual empirical evidence or cited statistics. Some evidence cited was not appropriate for illustrating inequalities; this was particularly the case where education was used. Candidates seemed confused between difference and inequality. For example, many talked about differences in attainment but this is only relevant if the reasons for the difference is unequal treatment and this can be supported with evidence of this. So, centres should take care when preparing candidates for this question and beware of examples and evidence that focus on difference rather than inequality. The best answers cited relevant research evidence rather than anecdotal accounts of inequality. Similarly, the best answers referred to a range of evidence and this evidence was explained in the context of how it demonstrated inequality.

Teachers are advised to urge students to read the instructions in the questions very carefully. Where they are asked for two areas of life they need to select two different areas of life. A significant number of candidates relied on examples rather than evidence and this prevented them from achieving band 4 marks.

Centres should be advised that candidates are not required to explain why the inequality exists. They are required to explain what the evidence shows and part of their AO2 mark is awarded for the appropriateness of the evidence offered.

The best answers demonstrated range and detail whilst weaker answers lacked either detail, range or both.

- 1.2** This was less popular than 1.3. Those candidates who did choose this option were able to give accurate descriptions of Weberian explanations of social inequality with varying levels of detail. Because a judgement was required here, candidates should have examined the value of alternative explanations to enable them to make a judgement on the value of Weberian ideas. Few did this. So, answers were either very good or fairly weak. Once again, descriptive accounts of different theories is at best, band 3 AO3 so candidates should be encouraged to examine the main theory in question and any others, evaluatively not descriptively.
- 1.3** This question was interpreted by the majority of students in the same way. However, this was not in line with the mark scheme. The examining team agreed that other interpretations of the question would be allowed but the skills descriptors of course, remained the same. Most candidates examined social class inequalities in different areas of life which we accepted. However, this usually meant that the essay was one sided, arguing for the view. Where candidates had attempted to discuss the essays often became unwieldy and side-tracked into essays on crime/education and so on. Some answers did examine whether social class or other factors are most important and some did examine Marxist ideas against other theories.

Section B

Option 1 Crime and Deviance

- 2.1** This question was answered well on the whole
- 2.2** Answers to this question often contained accurate descriptions of what feminists say about crime and deviance. 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.
- 2.3** Unfortunately the vast majority of answers were merely descriptive accounts of crime statistics on social class. The explanations of the patterns often focused on functionalist ideas. Where students referred to alternative views of the relationship between social class and crime they did so in a descriptive way and this meant that evaluation was juxtaposed. Very few candidates utilised evidence or examples as vehicles for evaluation of the theories described and this meant that their AO2 and AO3 marks rarely reached top band. Teachers would be wise to focus on the ability of students to effectively demonstrate all three skills. We have consistently reported that descriptive account of theories will not enable students to access the higher marks for AO2 and AO3.

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 entirely anecdotal and non-sociological reasons, reflecting a lack of knowledge and understanding.

3.2

3.3 Many candidates offered well supported lines of debate though these were often one sided. Whilst material factors clearly do lead to inequalities in health, other factors should have been examined so that the role that material factors play could be determined.

Option 3 Power and Politics

4.1 Few candidates chose this option. However, those who did, offered competent, accurate and well supported responses on the whole.

4.2 Many candidates offered generalised responses or descriptive accounts of postmodern ideas of power. However, there were some, very competent, well-balanced discussions and these were appropriately rewarded.

4.3 There were a handful of responses and as such, we are unable to offer any useful reflections that may be helpful to teachers.

Option 4 World Sociology

5.1 This question was mixed in terms of response. Most answers scored higher marks for AO1 than AO2. Evidence and explanation of what the evidence shows was lacking in many answers. Many candidates seemed confused about what the question meant.

5.2 There were no examples of this essay.

5.3 Of the few examples, this question was not interpreted well. Some candidates recognised that Dependency theory and the problems associated with aid were at the heart of the debate. Some were able to utilise excellent examples whilst others cited none.



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