



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**SOCIOLOGY
A LEVEL**

SUMMER 2023

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SOCIOLOGY

GCE A LEVEL

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COMPONENT 1 SOCIALISATION AND CULTURE

General Comments

The paper was accessible, and the majority of candidates were able to demonstrate knowledge across the range of topics. Some very strong and sophisticated responses were seen. The biggest differentiating factor was the higher order skills of analysis and evaluation which were not evident in all candidates' responses.

There were a significant number of candidates who failed to accurately or fully respond to the demands of the question. For example, the instruction to use sociological evidence and examples was too often ignored by candidates, thus reducing the marks they could be awarded.

The use of empirical and sociological evidence to illustrate and support discussion is expected across the range of topics and centres are encouraged to explore contemporary research where available.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Compulsory section A

1.1 Most candidates were able to demonstrate some knowledge of the meaning of socialisation. However, some were unsure and offered very generalised definitions with many relying heavily on the item for their answer. As a result, several 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.

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 for AO1. Most candidates wrote about family, work or education. Good answers included concepts such as canalisation, hidden curriculum, imitation, sanctions and role modelling, showing a clear understanding of how these agents teach social roles. However, a significant minority failed to do so. Those who chose religion as an agent rarely focused on how roles are learnt. Where candidates referred to more than one process whilst talking about one of the agents of socialisation and also had a process in the other agent, they could access the full range of marks for AO1. A significant number of candidates were unable to give clear examples of a 'social role' such as mother, gender roles, employment, student and therefore did not achieve the higher mark bands for AO2. Candidates who talked in general terms about what socialisation is rather than the processes 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

- 2.1** There were some excellent answers to this very accessible question. The best answers showed a sound knowledge and understanding of the reasons why divorce 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 divorce rates. For example, Sue Sharpe was used to explain women are now prioritising careers and education, but this was not used to explain the change in divorce rates. The best answers offered three or more reasons which were explained with some supporting sociological evidence and/ or examples. Weaker responses 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.
- 2.2** This was by far the more popular of the two question options. This question was answered well by some candidates. However, there were several weak answers where it was evident that candidates did not understand the focus of the debate and used a previously rehearsed essay for the role of the nuclear family. The best answers accurately identified the debate in the question and focused on outlining, analysing, and evaluating it. Answers that merely wrote descriptive accounts of theories of family in relation to the nuclear family did not score highly in AO2. A significant number of candidates were unable to construct effective discussions. There was often a distinct lack of evidence to support or reject an idea 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, rather than debating views on the diversity of family and household structures as the command words required. Nevertheless, there were some excellent well-crafted responses.
- 2.3** This was essentially an open essay where candidates could use a variety of evidence-based research or sociological perspectives. However, some candidates offered descriptive accounts of theoretical ideas. Whilst it was entirely acceptable for candidates to present these ideas, success was measured by the effectiveness of their evaluation of these ideas which required empirical evidence. Candidates who did examine whether relationships in families are equal, almost always focused on conjugal relationships. This was accepted, however, it limited the marks to mark band 3 and it is worth noting that relationships should cover other family members. Therefore, there was an opportunity for candidates to consider more than just conjugal roles should they have wished to do so. 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.

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, gender or ethnicity and membership of youth cultures.

However, there were a minority 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 and Households option, some candidates cited reasons for the relationship but failed to explain them and this was reflected in their AO2 mark.

- 3.2** 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 candidates failed to score highly this was 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 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.
- 3.3** This was also a popular question with most who answered it being able to identify the view as a postmodernist one. Most then wrote descriptive accounts of postmodernist and/or functionalist ideas. Many were able to write descriptive accounts of alternative ideas which meant that evaluation was by juxtaposition rather than by debate. As such, these answers were not able to score above the bottom of band 3 for AO3.

Section C

Option 1 Education

- 4.1** This was answered quite well by many candidates. The best answers presented different theoretical and evidence-based ideas about labelling which were supported by examples and/or references to writers or studies. The best answers focused on the impact of the labelling on attainment as required in the question. A minority of candidates did not address the influence of the labelling but instead concentrated on describing what it is and because of this, they were not able to access the higher mark bands. Candidates are advised to read the question/command very carefully.
- 4.2** This was a popular question and many candidates answered it well. The best answers did not merely list what Marxists say, they challenged the ideas with reference to alternatives. However, because it was necessary to consider alternative ideas, many candidates lost the focus on Marxism and the essay became a descriptive account of theories and theorists. This often resulted in a juxtaposed essay which adversely affected the 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 a slightly less popular question. It was answered well by some candidates, but many candidates failed to focus on ethnicity in their essay. A significant number of candidates focused only on black students and whilst this was accepted, it limited the marks available to mark band 3. 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 outcomes between different ethnic groups assessing the value of each as the question demanded. 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 marks were lower.

Option 2 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” was often ignored.
- 5.2** In general, this essay was reasonably well attempted and there were some very good answers. The question allowed candidates to utilise a wide range of knowledge and on the whole, the quality of answers was good. Many candidates presented dated studies and theories which focused on females being invisible in the past. The best answers included groups such as ethnicity, disability and age.
- 5.3** This was a less popular choice in this option and answers were mixed. Some were very good and others very weak. There were a number of anecdotal accounts rather than theoretical ones and many candidates had a tentative grasp of pluralism. Such responses could not be highly credited.

Option 3 Religion

- 6.1** A much less popular option. There were some competent answers although supporting evidence and examples were often basic or missing altogether. Where this was the case, the mark awarded reflected this. The command “using sociological evidence” was often ignored and replaced with references to religious texts.
- 6.2** Answers to this question were mixed and polarised. Some were very good and others very weak. There were some anecdotal accounts rather than theoretical ones and many candidates had a tentative grasp of relevant theories.
- 6.3** Very few candidates answered this question. Those who did not were unable to give any evidence for NRMs.

Summary of key points

Some key recommendations:

- Understand the skills required for essay writing such as application of evidence and evaluation.
- Understand the command words and how to decode the requirements of a question.
- Use a range of contemporary evidence to improve the quality of evidence-based questions.

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COMPONENT 2 METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

General Comments

For this Component there are two questions, with the first question having three parts. Candidates are required to answer all questions. While there were improvements this year in terms of candidates understanding the exam structure, answers still 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

- 1.1** This was a straightforward question where candidates on the whole showed a good understanding of methodological language. The best answers would define the term quantitative data then make at least 2 points explaining the features of quantitative data, using terminology such as reliable, representative and objective, while also showing understanding of these terms. Some candidates would recognise that quantitative data is preferred by positivists, but the best answers could explain why this is the case. 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 display 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** The key to answering this question is to contextualise the item, in this case, explaining why the researchers in the item decided to use random sampling. This is reflected in the higher marks available for AO2 than the previous 5-mark question (1.1). Some candidates simply defined random sampling without contextualising to the people/topic in the item. The best answers were able to show understanding of random sampling and use terminology such as representative, objective, reliable in relation to the item. Some candidates wasted valuable time by referring to other research. There is no need to refer 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.
- 1.3** Similarly to previous years, it is important candidates are made aware of the demands of this question as some candidates neglected to reference the item causing them to lose three AO2 marks and others failed to refer to sociological studies (at least two are expected for top band), therefore reducing the AO1 mark. Most candidates could define different types of interviews with some also explaining the use of focus groups.

Some candidates used PET as a way of structuring their answer and, while mnemonics are a good way of helping candidates remember their answer, in this case it often meant candidates answered in a generalised fashion, losing focus on the specifics of the question, for example, referring to multiple ethical issues that weren't necessarily relevant to interviews. The best answers could define the different types of interviews, had a balance of strengths and weaknesses and then supported their points with studies (such as Dobash and Dobash, Wilmott and Young, Oakley, Townsend, CSEW) whilst also using methodological language.

- 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 eight for the research design (AO1), ten for the way in which they justify their design in relation to the brief and being an A Level student (AO2) and a further twelve for the issues the design raises, that is, the impact of the research design on the quality of the research (AO3).

Many lower achieving answers seemed to have pre-planned responses but had failed to contextualise their response to the age group and topic of gender roles. 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 created, 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 candidates 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. Some candidates would refer to other research which isn't required in this question – some lost focus by doing this, however, some were able to say where their own research would fit in. 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. Most candidates operationalised terms such as 'gender roles' and 'area' with weaker responses using the term 'measure' instead of explicitly referring to operationalisation. Some recognised the importance of operationalising but then failed to specify which variable they would define. The best answers were able to explain why operationalising is important e.g. to reduce ambiguities/improve reliability but some failed to do this.
3. The sampling technique to be used. On the whole, sampling was quite weak with a significant minority using random sampling without saying where they would obtain a sampling frame or if they did, obtaining a list from a GP. 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 of their choice. Weaker responses would simply state a sampling method but not elaborate on the specifics. The use of an incentive was a good way of improving the response rate but some candidates would use this unrealistically e.g. offering £10 to each participant rather than entering a prize draw.

4. The research 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 responses 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 as many chose to knock on doors and conduct unstructured interviews without considering the feasibility/ethics of this.
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 families/gender roles 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, for example, if candidates chose interviews, they recognised a need for training.
7. Key concepts. In addition to the points above, candidates should be advised that they must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the key concepts and be able to utilise them appropriately and accurately. They should be aware 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.

Summary of key points

- It is important that candidates understand the commands terms and the demands of each question.
- Contextualising responses to the item is important when responding to all questions. Generic responses cannot access higher mark bands.
- Candidates must be able to accurately utilise, apply and explain methodological language.
- Candidates must provide answers which meet the demands of the question to reach the top mark bands.

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COMPONENT 3 POWER AND STRATIFICATION

General Comments

The paper seemed to be generally accessible to candidates. Even where options were only chosen by a small number of candidates all questions were answered by some candidates. The majority were able to demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding on the topic areas covered.

Most candidates chose Crime and Deviance in Section B with World Sociology being the second most popular choice. Very few candidates opted for Health and Disability or Power and Politics.

Rubric errors were seen but were not common.

Handwriting was at times very poor, being either almost illegible or so small that it was extremely difficult to read.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

- 1.1** This was question about inequalities. This year it was an open question and candidates were able to identify for themselves which areas of social life they wanted to focus upon.

Candidates who identified two areas of social life such as education, family, the workplace or the media and who then discussed inequalities in those areas with evidence to support their claims, were able to access the top mark bands. Those candidates who only listed differences were placed in mark bands one or two. Candidates can cite a range of empirical data including statistics so long as they are linked to an inequality which lead to that empirical data. For example, if candidates cited data for GCSE results between say males and females, that would be a difference, it would only become an inequality if it was linked to what causes those differences, for example the way they might be labelled in a classroom. Some candidates misread the question and did not identify two social areas rather they identified different social groups such as social class, gender, ethnicity or age and then considered how they might experience inequalities in a range of social areas.

The best responses structured their answer clearly for example:

The first area of social life where there are social inequalities is ...The second area of social life where there are social inequalities is..

- 1.2** This was a popular question. The question asked for feminist explanations. Candidates were expected to discuss a range of feminist explanations, for example, liberal, Marxist, radical and black feminists at the very least. Many candidates were familiar with the different strands of feminism and with sociologists commonly associated with the different strands. However, some candidates knew the different strands but became confused regarding which sociologist/s might be most commonly associated with which strand. A significant number of candidates just referred to feminists in general and some did not mention feminists at all and simply considered gender inequalities in relation to different areas of social life almost as if they were answering question 1.1.

Each strand of feminism needs to be supported by one or two names of relevant feminists. The strand of feminism needs to be explained and developed in terms of what it says. The sociologists being used should also be detailed if the candidate is to be placed in the top mark bands. AO3 marks were awarded where candidates either evaluated feminists against each other or against other theories. Some candidates decided to start with functionalist and/or New Right explanations of gender inequalities and not feminist explanations. Centres are advised to teach candidates to read each question carefully and respond to the specific demands of the question and it should be made clear that they must begin with the explanations identified in the question.

Starting with what might be deemed to be an evaluation of the explanation identified in the question was also seen in responses to questions 2.2 and 5.2.

- 1.3** There were significantly less candidates who opted for this question compared with 1.2. There were some wide-ranging and detailed answers to the question however, a significant number of candidates misread the question and restricted their answer to black ethnic groups and in many cases to only black males and did not consider that everyone has an ethnic background. Those that did simply refer to black males rather than discussing ethnicity more broadly, could not access the higher mark bands. Many candidates started with the work of Sheila Patterson, written in 1964 but if they did not cite any other sociologists working in this field, their mark was restricted. There are numerous sociologists working in the contemporary UK on ethnic inequalities and similarly, whilst the Macpherson Report made a significant contribution to our understanding of ethnic inequality, candidates should also be referring to more recent reports such as the Lammy Review of 2017.

Section B

Option 1 Crime and Deviance

- 2.1** This question has the same stem as 3.1, 4.1 and 5.1 and required candidates to utilise sociological evidence. In all of these questions we saw candidates providing evaluation. As noted in previous reports, there are no AO3 marks available and therefore candidates are wasting time if they offer evaluation on a paper where they have a lot to do.
- 2.1** This was done well by many candidates who were able to follow the stem and cite and explain in detail, sociologists who argue that women are treated differently to men by the criminal justice system (CJS). However, if they simply cited the name/s of relevant sociologists without providing detail they could not be highly rewarded. All answers on this paper require details of sociologists and other evidence that is used if candidates are to access the top mark bands.

Another issue with responses to this question was that candidates made no reference to the CJS. It was left to the examiner to make the connection. Once again candidates who did this could not access top mark bands. As with other questions a coherent structure would assist candidates in focusing on the demands of the question. For example, three to four paragraphs which start with:

One sociologist who argues.....by the CJS is and then a detailed explanation of their arguments.

- 2.2** Those who opted for this question were able to do it relatively well however, some did not start by setting out in detail the major tenants of left realism. They either started with right realism or with the solutions proposed by left and right realists. As mentioned in 1.2 above, centres are advised to teach candidates to read each question carefully and respond to the specific demands of the question and it should be made clear that they must begin with the explanations identified in the question.
- 2.3** Candidates had a wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of subcultures possibly linked to those who had studied youth culture for component 1. However, some candidates did not thoroughly read the demands of the question in terms of linking crime and deviance to subcultures and consequently could not access the top mark bands. These candidates often listed subcultural theorists without considering fully what the question commanded them to do.

Option 2 Health and Disability

Very few candidates chose this option.

- 3.1** See comments for 2.1 regarding reading the stem of the question and evaluation.

Candidates who did option 2 had been well prepared for a question on impairments and consequently were able to cite a range of relevant sociologists. Although some did offer evaluation it was less frequent on this question compared to 2.1 or 4.1 or 5.1.

- 3.2** This question was answered well by those who opted for it. Many candidates demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of the biomedical model and were able to evaluate in a detailed way.
- 3.3** It was good to see candidates referring to the Marmot Review as well as other reports and research in their answers. The main issue observed with responses to this question was that candidates did not always engage with the full demands of the question, in particular the request to discuss the way gender **influences** health and illness. Again, centres are reminded of the need to teach candidates to read the question carefully and to address all aspects.

Option 3 Power and Politics

- 4.1** See comments under 2.1 regarding evaluation.

This question required candidates to pull together material they had learned from across this option. Some did this very well and were clearly able to apply what they had learned and were consequently rewarded by being placed in the top mark bands.

- 4.2** Candidates had been well prepared for this question and they were able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in relation to the relevant sociologists and elite theories of power in a detailed and wide-ranging way.
- 4.3** Candidates who chose to answer this question were not as well prepared as those who attempted question 4.2. They were able to provide some contemporary examples but generally did not seem to understand about the different types of pressure groups and the role they play in the contemporary UK.

Option 4 World Sociology

Generally, candidates had been well prepared for this option. In particular they were able to cite a wide range of examples. Too many however, referred to Africa and /or Asia as if they were countries rather than continents.

- 5.1** As with all the other 20-mark questions candidates wasted time evaluating rather than simply explaining why some sociologists argue foreign aid does not reduce poverty. Candidates who did answer the specifics of the questions were able to support their arguments with detail of a wide range of relevant sociologists.
- 5.2** This question gave candidates the option of providing a clear exposition of dependency theories and many did, using relevant names. Those who used the names of researchers and economists and others who are not sociologists per se were rewarded if detail of their arguments were supplied and linked to the question. Evaluation came from Parsons, Inkeles, Hoselitz and Rostow. A significant number of candidates provided a long summary of Rostow's 5 stages without linking them to an evaluation of dependency often in a juxtaposed way. If most of the evaluation is juxtaposed then candidates cannot access the higher mark bands. This applies to all the 40-mark essay questions in all of the options.
- 5.3** Some candidates were able to discuss the **influence** of globalisation. 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 aid and, whilst aid is relevant, if this was the only content of the answer, it meant they drifted away from the focus of the question.

Summary of key points

- Candidates should always cite the names of sociologists/relevant reports and official data to support the claims they are making. They should not simply name them or list them but provide detailed knowledge and understanding of what they say relevant to the specifics of the question.
- Candidates should always read the question carefully and ensure they respond to the full demands of the question. For example, if asked for feminist explanations candidates should evaluate a range of different feminist explanations, they should not simply refer to feminists in general throughout the answer.

- The 20-mark questions do not require evaluation, there are no AO3 marks available. Candidates must be reminded of this.
- Many candidates had been well prepared in relation to evaluation and sustaining it throughout the essay. Others were still juxtaposing and should be given opportunities to practice how to maintain evaluation.
- More candidates seemed to understand that to access the AO2 marks they should explain why the sociologist/evidence is relevant to the question and link it to other evidence they are using.



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