



GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

AS SOCIOLOGY (NEW)

SUMMER 2016

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SOCIOLOGY

General Certificate of Education

Summer 2016

Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

Unit 1 – ACQUIRING CULTURE

General comments

The majority of candidates responded well to this new paper. Indeed there were many excellent responses and teachers should be congratulated on the quality of work produced.

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

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

Centres are advised to remind candidates to take careful note of command words so that they respond appropriately in their answers. This is especially true of the essay questions. Where a discussion is required the answer should not be descriptive in tone. Candidates are sometimes disadvantaged by offering a juxtaposed range of points only. The most popular option was Option 1 Families and Households. The standard of the responses was similar between both options. With regard to the essay questions 2 (b) and 3 (b) were far more popular than questions 2 (c) and 3 (c). The (c) questions were not answered well with the majority of the responses failing to address the notion of 'significance'.

There were very few rubric errors and candidates had evidently used their time effectively. The level of English and, where appropriate, Welsh was good.

Question 1 - Compulsory

(Part a)

Most candidates had some understanding of the term primary socialisation and many were awarded full marks for this question. The stronger candidates defined both elements of the term and provided two or three knowledge points to support their understanding.

Candidates should be reminded that they are required to refer to the item. Those who failed to do this or just copied part of the item could not score full marks for AO2. Examiners were looking for evidence that candidates had processed the information in the item in order to demonstrate their understanding. Weak answers often lost focus and drifted into an explanation of secondary socialisation.

(Part b)

The focus of this question is on 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. Many of the stronger responses focused on the family as one of the agents of socialisation and drew on the work of Anne Oakley and the process of developing gender identity. Education, media and peer groups were also discussed but sometimes in less detail and with less focus on the process of socialisation. Candidates need to take note of the particular focus of the question, which in this case was 'how any two agents of socialisation gender identity'. The stronger candidates gave specific examples of how the process of socialisation can influence specific aspects of gender identity. Candidates who wrote generic answers that took no account of this focus failed to score top marks. Similarly, a significant number of candidates who were able to demonstrate sound knowledge of the process did not always use the item effectively to illustrate their answer and some made no reference to it at all. This meant that they could not score full marks for AO2. In this instance it would have been wise to use family as one of the two agents of socialisation.

Some candidates referred to primary and secondary socialisation but failed to identify and write about two specific agents. They therefore failed to gain high marks.

Option 1 - Families and Households

Compulsory question

Q. 2 (a) (i)

As with question 1(a) examiners were looking for an accurate definition and two/three knowledge points for AO1 marks. AO2 marks were awarded for examples and/or evidence to support the points. Most candidates were able to offer a definition of the term. Many referred to Chester and the neo-conventional family and were able to provide evidence regarding the changing position of women to support their answers. Weaker answers were often vague and assertive. Many stated that an increase in dual-earner families led to joint conjugal roles without further explanation or evidence.

Q.2 (.a) (ii)

The stronger responses referred to two different reasons for the increase in the number of people who do not marry and supported the reasons with detailed sociological evidence and examples (AO1). They also gave a clear explanation of the reasons and supporting evidence / examples (AO2).

Many referred to reasons such as secularisation, the changing position of women, the increase in cohabitation, the cost of marriage and changing norms and values. Weaker answers often gave overlapping reasons or lost focus on the question. Many cited cohabitation as a step before marriage rather than a reason for not getting married. Weaker answers also failed to include appropriate evidence to support their reasons.

Q.2 (b)

This was by far the most popular choice of essay question in this option. Most candidates recognised this as a functional / New Right perspective. Many had detailed knowledge of these perspectives and relevant sociologists. Consequently these responses were awarded marks in the highest band for AO1. The stronger responses were the ones that were able to use their knowledge in terms of the question. They were able to use evidence to argue that the nuclear family is ideal and to evaluate this view usually with reference to other perspectives, again with supporting evidence (AO2 and 3).

Weaker responses often gave a description of the relevant perspective but often failed to link this to the notion of 'ideal'. In these responses evaluation was often juxtaposed and not explicit.

A common error was a misunderstanding of the Marxist view of the nuclear family with many stating that Marxists would argue that the nuclear family is ideal as it supports capitalism.

Q.2 (c)

This question was not as popular as question 2 (b) and generally the responses were weak.

The majority of candidates discussed reasons for high divorce rates but failed to address 'significance'. Candidates who gave a detailed account of the reasons with reference to theory and supporting evidence were able to score well for AO1 but if significance was not addressed then they were not able to access the top mark band for AO2 or AO3.

There were many weak answers that were generalised and lacking in references to theory or evidence.

Option 2 - Youth Cultures

Compulsory question

Q.3 (a) (i)

As with question 1(a) examiners were looking for an accurate definition and two/three knowledge points for AO1 marks. AO2 marks were awarded for examples and/or evidence to support the points. Most candidates were able to offer a definition of the term. Many referred to neo-tribes as a postmodern concept and made reference to relevant sociologists such as Bennett and Maffesoli. Weaker answers were often vague and assertive and often tried to compare neo-tribes to spectacular youth subcultures and moved the focus of the answer to subcultures rather than neo-tribes

Q.3.a) (ii)

The stronger responses referred to two different reasons why some young people form anti-school subcultures and supported the reasons with detailed sociological evidence and examples (AO1). They also gave a clear explanation of the reasons and supporting evidence / examples (AO2).

Many referred to reasons such as status frustration, crisis of masculinity and racism. Weaker answers often gave overlapping reasons or lost focus on the question. These responses often cited relevant reasons but failed to link these reasons to the development of anti-school subcultures. Weaker answers also failed to include appropriate evidence to support their reasons.

Q.3 (b)

This was by far the most popular choice of essay question in this option. Most candidates recognised this as a Marxist perspective. Many had detailed knowledge of this perspective and relevant sociologists. Consequently these responses were awarded marks in the highest band for AO1. The stronger responses were the ones that were able to use their knowledge in terms of the question. They were able to use evidence to argue that youth cultures act as a form of resistance and to evaluate this view usually with reference to other perspectives, again with supporting evidence (AO2 and 3). The best responses discussed the relevance of resistance in modern day youth culture with specific reference to postmodernism.

Weaker responses often gave a description of the relevant perspective but often failed to link this to the notion of 'resistance'. These responses often gave detailed descriptions of youth cultures/subcultures but failed to apply their knowledge effectively. In these responses evaluation was often juxtaposed and not explicit.

Q.3 (c)

This question was not as popular as question 3 (b) and generally the responses were weak. Many of the candidates discussed reasons for changes to youth cultures but failed to address 'significance'. Candidates who gave a detailed account of the reasons with reference to theory and supporting evidence were able to score well for AO1 but if significance was not addressed then they were not able to access the top mark band for AO2 or AO3.

There were many weak answers that were generalised and lacking in references to theory or evidence. In the weakest answers the reasons were very implicit and not clearly identified.

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UNIT 2 UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY AND METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

General Comments

Question

Q. 1 (a)

Many candidates understood that representativeness was linked to sampling and to generalizability; some referred to 'target population'. The majority of candidates used the item and referred to the large sample of '15,000' in their answers. A significant number of candidates were not able to offer a simple definition of the term and this precluded them from achieving full marks.

Q. 1 (b)

The majority were able to identify at least one ethical issue. Teachers should be advised that encouraging students to write in a clearly structured way usually enhances the clarity of their answers. For example, they might flag up their first reason with a simple opening gambit such as: the first ethical issue and so on. Candidates who supported their knowledge with clear examples used to illustrate were more likely to achieve the highest AO2 marks. Some candidates used studies to illustrate though this was not a requirement of the question.

Q. 1 (c)

The majority of answers showed awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of questionnaires, but varied significantly in breadth and depth. A significant minority confused validity and reliability. A lot of evaluation was 'juxtaposed' and underdeveloped. Many answers did not include studies and this was the most consistent reason for them scoring low marks. It was a clear requirement of the question for candidates to refer to studies to illustrate the points that they were making. Answers that merely listed strengths and weaknesses did not achieve high marks.

Q. 2 (a) Education [by far the most popular option]

(i) Most candidates understood the data and gave good answers. However, not all gave the comparative points which would enable them to access Band 3 marks. Several students tried to work out 'differences' and this resulted in mathematical errors. Some thought the data referred to 'China' and 'India' and didn't understand they were UK figures even though the source clearly stated that the data was from the UK. Several gave reasons for the patterns, which was not required. The best answers identified relationships between social characteristics and the statistics. In most cases points were supported with reference to the data.

(ii) The good answers clearly identified 'reasons'. The best were sociological reasons which were outlined, explained and supported with reference to writers or studies. Candidates could draw on their knowledge and understanding required in the debates section of the specification to answer this question. The specification encourages candidates to make connections and to develop their analytical skills. A significant number of responses relied heavily on common sense ideas and anecdotal references and examples. Such answers did not score high marks.

Q. 2 (b)

This was an accessible question which required candidates to examine and make a judgement on the functionalist view of differential attainment and specifically on the notion of meritocracy. Essay writing techniques were often very poor particularly in the demonstration of the higher order skills. A great deal of work needs to be done to improve the level of competency especially in relation to evaluation which was very often characterised by juxtaposition. The best answers examined the concept of meritocracy in a detailed evaluative way, utilising evidence and examples effectively to enable a judgement to be made about the accuracy of the view. Many candidates used alternative theories and evidence to construct their criticisms of the functionalist view of meritocracy. Some candidates were unable to demonstrate any sociological knowledge of either the concept or sociological theories of education. Some candidates wrote essays on the functions of education and as a result did not achieve high marks. Candidates should be advised to take time to read the questions carefully so that they accurately interpret what they are required to do in their response; a sound understanding of command words is essential.

Q.2 (c)

This was a popular question with a variety of responses. Some candidates talked in general terms about interactionism. Very few candidates engaged in a detailed debate about the impact of labelling which meant that they failed to present a discussion. Many failed to consider that some students reject labels which meant that the opportunity to consider whether the negative label may have led to a positive outcome. There were nevertheless some very high quality responses and teachers and pupils should be congratulated for the high level evaluative and analytical style of these responses. Sadly these were not typical.

Media

Q.3 (a)

(i) Most candidates understood the data and were able to describe the patterns. However, not all gave the comparative points which once again would enable them to access Band 3 marks. As with the education option some students tried to work out 'differences' and this resulted in mathematical errors. Several gave reasons for the patterns, which was not required. The best answers identified relationships between social characteristics and the statistics. In most cases points were supported with reference to the data.

(ii) The good answers clearly identified 'reasons'. The best were sociological reasons which were outlined, explained and supported with reference to writers or studies. Candidates could draw on their knowledge and understanding required in the debates section of the specification to answer this question. The specification encourages candidates to make connections and to develop their analytical skills. A significant number of responses relied heavily on common sense ideas and anecdotal references and examples. Such answers did not score high marks.

Q.3b

This was an accessible question which required candidates to examine and make a judgement on Marxist views of ownership and control of the media. Essay writing techniques were often basic particularly in the demonstration of the higher order skills. A great deal of work needs to be done to improve the level of competency especially in relation to evaluation which was very often characterised by juxtaposition. The best answers examined the concept of Marxist ideas of ownership and control in a detailed evaluative way, utilising evidence and examples effectively to enable a judgement to be made about the accuracy of the view. Many candidates used alternative theories and evidence to construct their criticisms of the Marxist views. Some candidates were unable to demonstrate any sociological knowledge of either the concept or sociological theories of the media. Most candidates were able to construct a debate but a significant number failed to make a judgement on the validity of the Marxist ideas of ownership and control of the media.

Q.3 (c)

The focus here was on a consideration of the usefulness of the theory so a judgement about this was required. To do this effectively the appropriate use of evidence with commentary on what the evidence suggests in relation to the debate was an essential element of high level success. Many candidates failed to engage in this at a high level of competency with many descriptive accounts of the Hypodermic Syringe Model of media effects. Some essays were descriptive accounts of alternative theories of media effects which meant that whilst the answer may have achieved some AO1 marks, it was unlikely to achieve many AO2 or AO3 marks. With so many contemporary examples that could have been used to argue the strengths and the weaknesses of the theory, few capitalised on this. Some candidates however were able to engage in high level sophisticated and well supported lines of debate and these were highly rewarded in each skill domain.

Religion**Q. 4 (a)**

There were no responses to this question.



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