



GCE Examiners' Report

Sociology
AS and 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 unit.

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	WJEC 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.wjec.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 WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.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	WJEC 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.wjec.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 WJEC 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 WJEC

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Executive Summary

Although the examining teams reported some pleasing responses to most questions; it is clear that for many candidates, knowledge of some sociological concepts, explanations and evidence seemed weaker than in the previous series.

In Unit 1, most candidates achieved a reasonable mark in response to the compulsory questions, focusing on processes like canalisation, manipulation, and role modelling. However, some candidates struggled to explain how these agents control behaviour. The quality of answers varied from centre to centre. In the optional questions, the quality of candidates' answers also varied across different centres with some candidates providing vague responses, while others provided detailed explanations. The most successful responses were those that provided appropriate evidence and explanations. Candidates are advised to understand assessment objectives, weighting of marks, command words, and use evidence to improve debate quality in essays.

In Unit 2, the assessment objective, AO1, is crucial for determining marks in a unit. However, candidates often struggled with concepts like 'generalisability' and 'ethnographic approach'. Generic responses and lack of discussion of evaluative points also hindered AO2 marks. Evaluation skills were often considered basic, leading to candidates losing AO3 marks for presenting both sides of a debate without evaluation or critique.

In Unit 3, the examining team observed more lower quality responses than seen in the previous series. Although only a few students failed to attempt questions and rubric errors were less common, illegible handwriting is a persistent issue. The examination was designed to be accessible, but accessing AO3 marks was seemingly the most difficult task for many candidates. Time allocation seemed appropriate, but generic responses and identification rather than discussion of appropriate evaluative points impeded AO3 marks.

In Unit 4, the questions are aimed to assess candidates' ability to apply research methods, understand research synopsis, and understand social inequalities. However, many candidates demonstrated weak evaluation skills and pre-rehearsed research designs. In response to the questions on inequality, some candidates used a "one size fits all" approach, while others focused on patterns of inequality and theoretical explanations. Both approaches were acceptable, but the best essays used evidence to enhance evaluative commentary.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Socialisation	'Unit 1: Socialisation and Culture – Revision sheet 1' Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser.
Families and Households	'Unit 1: Families and Households – Revision sheet 3a' Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser.
	Families and households - Blended Learning (d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net)	Blended learning.
Youth cultures	Unit 1: Youth culture – Revision sheet 3b' Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser.
	Youth Culture - Blended Learning (d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net)	Blended learning.
Unit 2: Compulsory question	'Unit 2: Section A Compulsory question 1a' 'Unit 2: Section A Compulsory question 1b' 'Unit 2: Section A Compulsory question 1c' Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser.
Gender differences in educational achievement	'Unit 2: Education - Gender and educational achievement' Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser.
	The role of education - Blended Learning (d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net)	Blended learning.
Feminist views on media representations of gender	'Unit 2: Media – Theoretical perspectives of the media'. Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser.
	Media - Blended Learning (d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net)	Blended learning.

Religion as a conservative force in society	'Unit 2: Section B - Religious theories'. Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser.
	Religion - Blended Learning (d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net)	Blended learning.
Moral panics	'Unit 3: Crime and deviance – Key terms'. Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser.
Institutional racism in the criminal justice system	Crime and deviance (a) - Blended Learning (d3kp6tphcrvm0s.cloudfront.net)	Blended learning.
Research Design task	'Unit 4: Research Methods Revision Sheet 2'. Resource WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organiser.

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UNIT 1 - ACQUIRING CULTURE

Overview of the Unit

All assessment objectives (AO1, AO2 and AO3) were assessed across the examination. Lower tariff questions allowed students to access AO1 and AO2 marks whilst higher tariff questions allowed access to all three assessment objectives. The focus of this unit is culture and specifically how we acquire culture.

Candidates must answer compulsory questions in Section A which assesses their knowledge and understanding of socialisation - the key process in the acquisition of culture. Section A contains one 5-mark question and one 10-mark question. In Section B, candidates select to answer questions from either Families and Households or Youth Cultures. There were three question types in this section. (a) (i) was a knowledge-based definition question worth 5 marks. (a) (ii) was an evidence-based question worth 10 marks. Candidates then had the choice about answering (b) or (c), which was a discussion-based essay question worth 30 marks. The total mark for the paper was 60.

The standard or candidate responses for this series was mixed. Few candidates demonstrated the highest levels of skill and more than usual seemed to demonstrate a basic or limited skills. The questions on the paper were accessible and was similar to previous series in terms of accessibility. The questions that candidates found most challenging were, as in previous series, the essay questions. To access the highest mark bands candidates are required to demonstrate higher order skills and analysis and evaluation. This was not done well by many candidates.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A – Compulsory questions

- Q.1**
- (a)** Most candidates were able to attain a reasonable mark for this question. Those candidates who failed to score full marks either failed to offer a clear definition of the term; did not use the item; or made both of these errors.

 - (b)** Most candidates were able to identify two agents of socialisation and most focused on the process, as the question required. These candidates were, therefore, able to access band 4 marks. Most candidates wrote about family, peer groups or education. Good answers included 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 to control behaviour. However, a significant minority failed to explain how agents do so. Some candidates conflated education and peer group. Where candidates referred to more than one process in one agent of socialisation and had one 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 3 marks for AO1.

Section B – Optional questions

Option 1 Families and Households

This option continues to be the more frequently attempted option.

Compulsory questions

- Q.2 (a) (i)** It was generally a case of candidates knowing or not knowing this term. Many candidates were awarded full marks, however, the quality of answers varied from centre to centre. Candidates from some centres had a clear understanding of “vertically extended family”, but a notable proportion of candidates from other centres gave definitions which were confused.
- (ii)** This question should have enabled candidates to produce rich, detailed responses. Indeed, some responses demonstrated detailed AO1. However, others presented generic reasons, unsupported with appropriate evidence or examples. The biggest problem with these questions is the effective use of evidence to support the reasons offered, followed by an explanation of how the evidence supports the reason. Successful candidate responses, that accessed the highest mark bands provided two accurate and relevant reasons that were supported with evidence and explained.

Optional questions

- (b),(c)** It was found that (c) was slightly more popular in terms of attempt rate than (b). (b) required a clear understanding of a range of explanations of family diversity. Many candidates were able to apply their knowledge and understanding but few were able to evaluate the explanations offered. (c) asked candidates to evaluate the view that families need fathers, and it was answered relatively well by many candidates. However, opportunities to apply evidence to the debate were not utilised.

Coaching candidates to construct well supported lines of debate is a way to enhance outcomes as well supported argument with commentary is more likely to give access to higher marks for AO3. Descriptive accounts of what different theories say about the value of fathers or about the traditional nuclear family model will not enable candidates to access the highest marks for AO3.

Option 2 Youth cultures

Compulsory questions

- Q.3 (a) (i)** Most candidates could offer a definition of countercultures though not all were able to access full marks. Adding detail to the definition by identifying features and examples of countercultures allowed candidates to score higher marks.

- (ii) This question was, overall, answered quite well. Most candidates were able to identify two reasons for the formation of youth cultures, with at least one reason supported with evidence. Studies used tended to be those by McRobbie & Garber, Hall & Jefferson, Stan Cohen, Clarke & Cohen. However, where candidates failed to access the highest marks, it was often because of a lack of supporting evidence.

Optional questions

- (b),(c) A similar number of candidates attempted questions 3 (b) or 3 (c). Candidates were able to demonstrate some knowledge of the view that youth cultures can be deviant in (b) and of feminist views of youth culture in (c). Candidates generally found (c) to be slightly more accessible than (b). In both of these essays, the same weaknesses observed in the essay questions from Option 1 Families and Households (questions 2 (b) and (c)) were evident in this option. Weak evaluation skills and lack of commentary linked to the focus of the debate were typical issues preventing access to the highest marks for AO2 and AO3.

In conclusion, candidates would be advised to understand the three assessment objectives/skills and how to demonstrate them in answers; to understand the weighting of marks and how much time to spend on each question; to understand the command words and what they require you to do, and finally, to use evidence to improve the quality of debate in essays.

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UNIT 2 – UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY AND METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

Overview of the Unit

The assessment objective, AO1, is responsible for the majority of marks awarded on this unit. Although traditionally this assessment objective is seen by most candidates as the most straightforward of assessment objectives, it is only straightforward if candidates have, and are able to display appropriate and accurate knowledge and understanding of the sociological concepts being assessed.

It was clear that concepts such as ‘generalisability’ and ‘ethnographic approach’, which although are appropriate sociological terms to be assessed on this unit were not as accessible to candidates as terms assessed in previous series.

Generic responses that failed to apply or contextualise the candidates’ knowledge were also seen and limited the marks awarded for AO2.

Identification rather than discussion of appropriate evaluative points was evident, which impeded the AO3 marks awarded to some candidates’ responses in 1(c). Evaluation skills were often considered to be limited or basic when many candidates lost AO3 marks for presenting both sides of the debate in juxtaposition without any evaluation or critique.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A – Compulsory questions

- Q.1** (a) This question required an explanation of the term ‘generalisability’ using material from the item. Most candidates attempted this question although many could not explain the term without simply repeating the word ‘generalisable’, rather than explaining how findings can be applied from a representative sample. Often candidates referred to methods as being more or less generalisable than others, without referring to sampling techniques or sample sizes. Better answers could articulate what made findings generalisable, commenting on what makes a representative sample and how the findings could be applied to a target population or wider society. The item was often quoted without application, but some better answers could explain the limitations of snowball sampling cited in the item. Candidates should be advised that there are no marks available for evaluation points in this question.

- (b) This question required candidates to explain two reasons for adopting an ethnographic approach in research, using the item, and it proved challenging for many candidates, who did not attempt a response or confused ethnography with ethnicity. Many candidates used the item to develop their explanation, though not always skilfully, with repetition or quotes being the main body of the answer. Of those that could explain ethnographic research, some received minimal credit for descriptive answers such as 'because it produces qualitative data' without elaborating on why this would be a reason to choose this method. Many responses were generic of qualitative research without a focus on the benefits of the ethnographic approach. Reference to the item was often a quote without development and many candidates found it difficult to apply the content of the item to this question. Those who did refer to other studies often cited Eileen Barker's research of the Moonies or Laud Humphrey's Tearoom Trade study but did not always use the research to highlight the reasons why this approach would be adopted. Better answers referred to sharing the experience of the participants which allowed for a full understanding of the area being studied.
- (c) Most candidates could access this question, but many failed to achieve the AO3 marks available. The requirements of the question were to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of structured interviews and, often the strengths and weaknesses of structured interviews were listed without any real discussion, beyond the terms 'however' or 'on the other hand'. Those who performed better could discuss the strength or weakness, such as being able to explain how structured interviews could be valid because of the presence of the researcher but also less valid because of the limitation to any elaboration of the question. Many candidates gave generic answers which could be applicable to most methods, such as 'allows informed consent/right to withdraw'. There was some confusion between validity and reliability and the term generalisability was used inaccurately with discussion of methods rather than samples. Some candidates could refer to the item, but many simply quoted that structured interviews were not used by the researcher in the item. Other studies that were referred to often used alternative methods such as observations, so they were used to evaluate types of data rather than the method in the question, which did not receive much credit. Better answers referred to Young & Wilmott's or Oakley's use of interviews to develop their evaluation points.

Section B – Optional questions

As with previous series, Option 1 Education is by far the most popular option in Section B. A notable minority of candidates attempted to answer questions from all options in Section B, an obvious rubric violation.

Option 1 Education

- Q.2** (a) (i) This question required a summary of the data in the chart: most candidates could attract credit for this question, but the responses ranged between those who could describe the patterns and trends in the data from the chart well, but without contextualisation, to those who made limited reference to the data patterns but had good, contextualised interpretation. Listing statistics from the chart without explanation of their meaning received basic credit, such as responses that explained a difference between years. Better answers could explain whether this was an increase or decrease in the number of students participating in HE. As in previous series, candidates should be reminded that accuracy is required for higher band credit – this includes correct explanations of differences between percentages. For example, many candidates inaccurately explained that the difference between 21.3% and 26.3% is 5%. Candidates should refer to the indicative content in the mark scheme to see that the accurate way to present this difference is a 5-percentage point difference. For top band, there should be some explicit interpretation of what the data represents in terms of participation in higher education between children who receive free school meals and those who do not. A significant minority continue to provide reasons for the data, which is not required.
- (ii) The majority of candidates attempted to explain two reasons for participation in higher education and the relationship with free school meals, with the most common being teacher labelling, material deprivation and cultural deprivation. Better answers included a range of points within these headings, such as diet, housing and lack of funds under the heading of material deprivation. Many candidates gave good explanations of how factors affected achievement or educational experience but did not apply this knowledge to the question (participation in HE). Those that did talk about the reasons why FSM children would not attend higher education mostly relied on ‘fear of debt’ and ‘cost of university’. There were rubric errors in this question where candidates presented the same reason twice, such as poverty, or explained more than two reasons; in this instance, the best two were credited. Often candidates evaluated the reasons which was not needed for this question and wasted time. A significant minority of candidates misunderstood the question and provided reasons for children receiving free school meals or misunderstood the term ‘higher education’ and talked about higher achievement in compulsory education.

- (b) This essay question was accessible to most and required a discussion of sociological explanations of gender differences in educational achievement. Many candidates lost marks for not being able to apply their points to the question and drifting into a general ‘theory of education’ response, without applying their knowledge to gender differences in achievement. Better answers focused on the reasons for the differences in achievement between boys and girls, using concepts such as labelling and changing gender roles. Many answers were descriptive, listing the reasons without any discussion, or were one-sided, focusing on how girls’ achievement has improved over time, without reference to how boys’ performance may have changed. Many AO3 marks were lost due to a lack of evaluation and reliance on juxtaposition to present different sides of the debate. Candidates should be reminded to elaborate beyond key words such as ‘however’ and ‘on the other hand’ and make criticisms of points raised before moving to alternative views. The best answers could provide a sophisticated debate and reach a judgement in their conclusion, rather than summarising what had already been said in the main body of the essay. Better answers could draw on relevant research studies to highlight their discussion, such as Willis, Jackson, Mitsos & Brown, Sharpe and Francis. Subject choice, socialisation and labelling were popular reasons but sadly were not always applied to achievement, with the focus more on school experience for boys and girls rather than developing the point to explain why these factors might affect performance.
- (c) This question was accessible to most and was a popular choice, requiring an assessment of the Interactionist view of educational achievement. Most answers focused on labelling with some candidates applying this to achievement. Better answers provided a range of interactionist views, including selection, subcultures and relationships within schools. Many answers were descriptive and used research studies such as Rosenthal and Jacobsen, Becker and Ball in detail, without effectively supporting their claims. Better answers could evaluate using alternative reasons for achievement, such as factors outside of school, providing a strong debate between internal and external factors, such as material deprivation, cultural deprivation and family influences. However, many candidates lost AO3 marks for presenting both sides of the debate in juxtaposition without any evaluation or critique. Some chose to evaluate interactionism with other theories such as Functionalism, Marxism or Feminism, but this was not often done skilfully and drifted into a general ‘theory of education’ essay without focus on an assessment of interactionist views of achievement.

Option 2 Media

- Q.3** (a) (i) This question was rarely attempted or was offered in addition to responses to Q.2, presenting a rubric error. Those candidates that did answer this question relied on repeating statistics from the chart with little interpretation of their meaning. As in previous series, many candidates could not accurately present differences in percentage points, for example, stating that the difference between 1.4% and 6.9% is 5.5%, rather than 5.5 percentage points. Many answers lost marks for listing difference rather than summarising the patterns and trends from the data.

- (ii) This question required two sociological explanations for media representations of black and minority ethnic groups. The small number of candidates who did attempt this question relied on general comments about stereotypes of black and minority ethnic groups rather than sociological reasons for how the media presents these groups. A significant minority who attempted this question explained reasons which were relevant to the education topic, such as labelling by teachers, rather than information relevant to the media topic. Centres should prepare candidates ensuring that they understand the demands of this paper and which questions to answer.
- (b) This question was not attempted by many candidates and when it was, there was very little application to ownership or control of the media, with most responses focusing on how the media has lost its power but not explaining to whom or reasons why. Many responses relied on postmodernist views of the new media and explanations of how influential this has become, without sociological evidence or commentary to support these claims. There was very little evaluation in the limited responses seen in this series.
- (c) This question required an assessment of feminist views of the media representations of gender and was answered better than the previous one but was still not a popular choice overall. Better answers explained the role of patriarchy in both media representation and in ownership of media with strong evaluation of how new media is making significant impact on how men and women are presented more equally. A range of feminist theories were often presented but with little evaluation from other theories or with empirical evidence to support or critique. A significant minority relied on explanations of changing gender roles in the family or society rather than answering the question.

Option 3 Religion

- Q.4**
- (a)
 - (i) A very small minority attempted this question and those that did often did so with rubric error by attempting several or all questions on the paper. The question required a summary of the content of the graph, and these tended to be lacking in detail with a general summary that religion declined with age, which attracted limited credit.
 - (ii) This question required two reasons for the decline in religion with age and many of the small number of candidates who attempted this question found this challenging. Those who did suggest reasons tended to focus on postmodern views of secularisation in general rather than reasons by age. Anecdotal responses received minimal credit, such as explanations of older people being more traditional or having more fear as they approached death.
 - (b) This essay required candidates to discuss the view that religion is a conservative force, which could have been evaluated with the argument for religion as a force for social change. This question was rarely attempted but those that did tended to be one sided with explanations of how Functionalism and Marxist views would suggest that religion maintains social solidarity or social control. Few candidates could evaluate this theory with explanation of social change, but when it was done effectively, examples of social unrest were quoted but not always applied to the debate (e.g. civil rights movements in USA and rebellions in South America and Northern Ireland).

- (c) This essay required an assessment of feminist views of religion and many candidates did not choose this option. When it was selected, the focus tended to be on the role of women in religious practices and how women's roles have changed with changes to gender in society in general, which did not answer the question. Often stereotypical views of women in religion were presented as sociological theory, such as women of certain religions being exploited in how they are forced to act or dress. Candidates should be made aware of the risk of presenting inaccurate, biased or ethnocentric views when taking this stance. Better answers focused on feminist views of how women have been presented in religious scripture and postmodernist explanations of how new religious movements present a more equal view of gender.

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UNIT 3 – POWER AND CONTROL

Overview of the Unit

Generally, the examining team observed that responses were of a lower standard than previous series, although as is always the case, there were some outstanding answers with many candidates clearly well prepared for the unit.

Very few students failed to attempt questions and rubric errors were also less common than last year. Illegible handwriting is a persistent issue. Centres are advised to consider alternative arrangements for candidates completing examinations in these cases, as candidates cannot be awarded marks if their answers are not legible.

Lack of use of paragraphs is an increasing issue for examiners, with essays in particular being extremely difficult to navigate. Effective structuring, particularly in 20-mark and 40-mark questions, can greatly increase the effectiveness of an answer. As stated last year, candidates who organise their essays into clear 'points', logically presented, are more likely to access the highest marks as use of different skills can be identified more easily.

Use of coloured pens, highlighters and even tippex was seen on some scripts. Candidates are reminded that only black ink or black ball-point are to be used in answer booklets.

It is now the case that many candidates do not write which questions they have attempted on the front of their examination booklet. Some candidates also do not indicate within the booklet which questions they are attempting, or label questions incorrectly.

'Option 1 Crime and Deviance' was the only option attempted by candidates during this series, except for one candidate responding to the questions in 'Option 3 World Sociology'.

All questions in all options are designed to be accessible, though the demands of each question increase in terms of AO skills required. AO3 is only assessed in the longer essay questions (b) and (c) in each option, where it is worth 14 of the 40 available marks. It continues to be the case that accessing these AO3 marks provides candidates with the most difficulty.

Time allocation seemed appropriate for the most part, however, for the majority of candidates, more time could be spent on (a) (i).

Comments on individual questions/sections

Questions 1, 2, 3 (b/c) These essay questions are marked on all three skills: AO1 – knowledge (13), AO2 – application (13) and AO3 – evaluation (14). AO3 continues to be the weakest skill. Well prepared candidates demonstrated they understood the importance of using relevant sociological writers, concepts and evidence which was analysed and evaluated appropriately. Most candidates provided a clear introduction and conclusion, though not all. Examples of excellent, sustained, explicit evaluation were still relatively uncommon. Increasingly, centres appeared to have provided ‘templates’ or ‘model answers’ for candidates, and as always, these templates do not always allow students to engage fully with the question and as such, may penalise the most able candidates and confuse the less able candidates.

Option 1 Crime and Deviance

Q.1 (a) (i) This question, as is also the case with 2(a)(i) and 3(a)(i), assesses AO1, knowledge and understanding (4 marks), and AO2, application of knowledge (6 marks). In Summer 2023, it was reported that the message seemed to have got through that evaluation is not necessary in these questions. This did not seem to be the case in 2024, where evaluation was very common. There continues to be a tendency to under answer these questions and top band answers are uncommon. The best prepared candidates understood the importance of providing a clear definition of the term/concept and referred to directly relevant sociological examples and writers. Direct, detailed focus on the question and named, relevant sociologists are essential for top band marks.

Nearly all candidates attempted this question, however, responses were considerably weaker than expected. Very few candidates received full marks, or even top band for this question. Although the majority of candidates were familiar with the term moral panic, clear and detailed definitions were in a minority and relevant sociological concepts and reference to relevant writers was often lacking. Stanley Cohen was the obvious choice of sociologist here, and although mentioned in many responses, there were only a minority of candidates who were able to use his work effectively. Hall’s Policing the Crisis was used by many, as was Young’s study ‘The Drugtakers’. Examples were often blurred and muddled. Many examples used were not appropriate in the sociology of crime context of a moral panic e.g. the panic buying of toilet roll during the pandemic. Some key concepts e.g. folk devils were used effectively by many. Other key concepts, e.g. deviancy amplification and moral entrepreneurs, were frequently misunderstood if used at all.

Candidates should consider spending more time on this question, developing their points/examples fully. It is still worth noting that definitions of any commonly used concepts can be used for this question.

- (ii) This question, as is also the case with 2 (a)(ii) and 3 (a)(ii) assesses AO1, knowledge and understanding (12 marks) and AO2, application of knowledge (8 marks). Centre effects were evident in answers, many structured very well with detailed identification of relevant points and supportive sociological evidence. It is still the case that some candidates wasted time evaluating this evidence, but this was not common. The use of anecdotal evidence rather than sociology was prevalent.

The range of quality of responses varied significantly for this question, however, most students seemed prepared for this topic area and were able to make some relevant points and write at length. Marxism was very popular, often as the sole focus of answers, which was perfectly acceptable when a range of relevant Marxist writers were referred to. White collar crime, strain theory, subcultural theories and left and right realism were also used effectively by many. Many students are able to structure this question well, providing a range of sociological theories, concepts and evidence to support the discussion, separating out their points into different paragraphs. Weaker responses used evidence about class and education rather than crime, or about gender and ethnicity rather than class, thus losing focus. Several candidates had limited sociology in their answers relying on generalised 'common-sense' explanations and anecdotal evidence, e.g. poor people stealing to survive. A significant minority wasted time evaluating their points.

Questions 1 (b) and (c), along with 2 (b) and (c) and 3 (b) and (c), are essay questions that assess all three assessment objectives: AO1 (13 marks), AO2 (13 marks) and AO3, evaluation (14 marks). AO3 continues to be the weakest skill displayed in these responses. Well prepared candidates demonstrated they understood the importance of using relevant sociological writers, concepts and evidence which was analysed and evaluated appropriately. Most candidates provided a clear introduction and conclusion, though not all. Examples of excellent, sustained, explicit evaluation were still relatively uncommon. Increasingly, centres appeared to have provided 'templates' or 'model answers' for candidates, and as always, these templates do not always allow students to engage fully with the question and as such, may penalise the most able candidates and confuse less able candidates.

- (b) This essay was by the less popular choice with candidates and was generally answered less well than 1(c). There were significant differences in the quality of responses to this question and a minority were excellent.

Most candidates referred to the Stephen Lawrence case, usually combined with the Macpherson report, although details of the case itself were often confused and inaccurate. The killing of George Floyd was also frequently referred to. The 1981 Scarman report was used more frequently than more updated information in terms of the Lammy Report, Denman Report or Casey Report, which could have helped evaluation. Gilroy, Hall, Phillips and Bowling, Lea and Young and Wilson were all used on occasion but there was rarely any debate in relation to the question.

The range of statistics used was vast and although some were accurate, often those used were wildly inaccurate, particularly in terms of the size of UK and prison populations, so did not support the answer. Many answers slipped into subcultural theories, Marxist theories or education and class and were not linked explicitly to the question.

A small but worryingly significant minority of students made use of racist slurs in their answers. As is often the case with the essay questions, several weaker responses focused on any revised theories with no link to the question, and these answers struggle to be placed above band 1. AO3 skills were particularly weak; most candidates only explained theories/studies/evidence in the context of the question, with broad, basic judgements and arguments juxtaposed with other theories at best.

Most students concluded that there was institutional racism in the CJS, whether or not their answer had demonstrated this! It therefore continues to be the case that candidates from most centres would benefit from working on AO3 skills development including assessment, evaluation, making judgements and writing conclusions, as these skills were not demonstrated well in the responses to this question.

- (c) A majority of candidates chose this question, and for the most part it was answered slightly more effectively than 1b), however, the fact that the question was focused on feminist views and not just gender and crime was problematic for many. Some candidates were able to offer a number of feminist theories in relation to the focus of the question, which was the consideration of patriarchy in terms of crime and were able to score highly in this question. There were some excellent discussions of Heidensohn, Carlen, Smart, Adler and Walklate for example, with some students bringing in other sociological theories/evidence to support and/or refute arguments. As is often the case, a 'centre effect' was evident, and apparent essay templates were used with varying degrees of effectiveness. There were many sociologists from a wide variety of standpoints referred to as feminists (and who definitely were not!), including Pollak, thus missing out on the opportunity to use chivalry thesis as evaluation to boost AO3 marks.

In a similar vein, many candidates seemed to ignore the focus of the question, instead, writing about different theories gender and crime, or in the weakest answers, writing about any theories of crime, perhaps making an occasional, tangential reference to gender. Some answers were generic with little to no sociology. Although some were able to focus their answer, most completely ignored the idea/importance of patriarchy even though it is asked in the question.

As with 1(b) many candidates struggled to demonstrate AO3 skills in their responses for this question, and were only able to explain feminist theories, with some basic judgement and evaluation of concepts. As is often the case with these theory essays, juxtaposition of different theories was the approach to AO3 skills, having few if any direct links or assessment of feminist theories.

Option 2 Health and Disability – N/A

Option 3 World Sociology – N/A

SOCIOLOGY

GCE

Summer 2024

UNIT 4 – SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND APPLIED METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

Overview of the Unit

This unit tests candidates' ability to apply what they have learned about methods of research to a research task, and to understand a research synopsis to be able to offer reasons why the researcher used specific research methods or sampling techniques in their research. The unit also tests candidates' understanding of social inequalities, both in terms of patterns and theoretical explanations, with all assessment objectives (AOs) being assessed.

The application of understanding of methods of research demonstrated too many pre-rehearsed research designs. Weak evaluation skills were also evident in many candidates' responses.

Some candidates outlined their research design as [i] followed by problems [ii]. This structure is fine but still required candidates to demonstrate clear and contextualised justification of choices and clear and contextualised problems and their impact. Pre-rehearsed "one size fits all" research designs inevitably failed to score high marks. Many, talked about operationalising the term "young people" even though this was not in the brief.

Some candidates chose to approach the 2(b) essay looking at patterns of inequality followed by theoretical explanations for each pattern whilst others looked at theoretical explanations for social inequality followed by reference to patterns. Both approaches were acceptable. The best essays demonstrated appropriate use of evidence to enhance evaluative commentary.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Applied methods of sociological enquiry – Compulsory questions

- Q.1**
- (a) This task requires candidates to demonstrate their ability to read and understand the research synopsis in the item. The question asked them to explain why the research decided to use focus groups in her research. The best answers offered two acceptable reasons which were explained, contextualised, and linked to methodological concepts. Candidates who merely offered two generic strengths of focus groups without clear, contextualised explanation were not rewarded with high AO2 marks.
 - (b) This task required candidates to demonstrate their ability to apply their knowledge and understanding of research methods to a specified brief, in this case, and investigation to collect data on attitudes to national vaccination programmes.

We expect to see a formulaic approach in as much as candidates are usually coached to outline different stages of the research design such as operationalising concepts, sampling, choice of methods, ethical issues. However, the choices at each stage must be unique to the design brief in the task.

Many candidates made no attempt to access a representative sample of people from the area where they live. Instead, they chose the default position “as I am an A Level student, I will use students in my sixth form/school”. Even doing that could have offered opportunities for them to address the brief by trying to access people from different age groups via school pupils. For example, parents, grandparents and, or other relatives. Unfortunately, very few did this and consequently the sampling section of their design very often lacked context and reasonable justification.

The type of data was not specified in the brief which allowed candidates the freedom to use whatever data collection method they felt suited the task best. Some chose qualitative methods, and some chose quantitative methods. However, a worrying number chose to use both or to use a semi-structured interview to collect both types of data. This was followed by descriptions of how this would enable them to collect quantifiable, representative, and generalisable data, even though they usually had a sample of 10 people. In addition, they noted that it would allow them to collect deep, detailed, valid data because they would automatically establish a rapport with the respondents. This demonstrated a significant lack of understanding.

Section B: Social Inequality – Optional questions

- Q.2, Q.3** (a) Candidates are required to select and outline evidence that demonstrates a dimension of social inequality from two areas of life. Some candidates thought that area meant class, gender, or ethnicity but the vast majority were able to describe evidence of inequality from two areas. Education and crime were the two most popular areas cited. Sometimes certain areas are better for specific dimensions of inequality. For example, it is often easier to cite evidence of ethnic inequalities in crime and education than it is to cite evidence of class inequalities in crime. Class inequalities are most evident in education and health. So, candidates would be wise to take care when selecting the areas of life that best demonstrate the specific dimension of inequality demanded by the question.
- (b) Question 2 was chosen by more candidates. As mentioned in the overview of this year’s paper, this question could be approached in more than one way. Some candidates presented well supported, detailed essays and consequently were awarded high marks in all three assessment objectives. However, some candidates got side-tracked and their response became an essay on theories of crime and deviance or on differences in educational attainment. Losing focus in essays inevitably impacts on marks in all three skills, especially AO2.

Candidates who chose question 3, an evaluation of sociological explanations for ethnic inequality responses were, overall, somewhat disappointing. Candidates often offered descriptive accounts of different sociological theories and often made no link to ethnic inequalities. Nevertheless, some candidates did engage successfully with the task and offered insightful commentary on sociological explanations for ethnic inequalities as well as consideration of the impact of other factors such as class and gender, thus offering range and detail in their response.

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