GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

GCSE (NEW)
SOCIOLOGY

SUMMER 2019

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SOCIOLOGY

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COMPONENT 1: UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL PROCESSES

General Comments

Candidates coped well with the demands of the new specification and the new style of examination paper. The new specification includes an extra topic to study and a more explicit emphasis on sociological theory than the previous specification. The majority of candidates were able to access most questions to a varying degree. The paper proved a good differentiator particularly with the essay questions. Weaker candidates were mostly able to identify the theory in the question and to describe the theory at a basic level and to engage in basic discussion. Stronger candidates displayed a pleasing knowledge of sociological theories and were able to analyse and discuss them with understanding and signs of a blossoming sociological imagination. These essays were a joy to read and abounding in sociological languages and concepts. Particularly pleasing was the emphasis on research with many candidates using relevant evidence to support their points. There was also greater focus on skills with some candidates displaying competency in all three skill domains. This will prove invaluable if they proceed to study Sociology at A level.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1   Most candidates received 4/4 marks, although some confused values with culture and opted for 'Marx' rather than Durkheim.

Q.2   **(a)**   Most candidates were able to explain the term identity with a reference to how we or others see ourselves.

Q.2   **(b)**   Many candidates were unaware of the meaning of the term 'gender'. Many distinguished between the terms sex and gender, arguing incorrectly that sex is the sex we are born with, while gender is the sex we choose. Very few understood that gender refers to the norms and expectations associated with being male/female. This is disappointing as gender is a key concept in Sociology.

Q.2   **(c)**   Most were able to accurately pick an example from the item. A few did not use the item and therefore scored nothing for their response.

Q.2   **(d)**   Most candidates were able to identify two ways in which schools pass on gender activities. The most common were the gendering of subjects and use of language. Candidates often did not go on to explain how these passed on gender identities. Too many candidates identified the use of separate toilets and separate changing rooms as examples. These are biologically necessary differences.

Q.3   **(a)**   Most candidates were able to explain why societies have sanctions.

Q.3   **(b)**   Most candidates were familiar with **what** the family teaches children but not the process and **how** the family teaches children the culture of their society. The question required candidates to refer to role models, sanctions etc. Alternatively, some candidates focused on cultural differences and how the family introduced children to different religions, foods, dress etc.

Q.3 **(c)** Most candidates were able to explain the differences between formal and informal sanctions although some confined themselves to examples and did not score highly.

Q.4 **(a)** Most candidates were able to describe an extended family, although a few confused it with a reconstituted family.

Q.4 **(b)** This question seemed to throw candidates and was often left blank. Successful candidates referred to laws passed to protect children; smaller families allowing more focus on children; the importance of education etc. Many candidates lost marks on this question.

Q.4 **(c)** Most candidates were able to identify two reasons why women are having fewer children, the most common being secularisation/change in norms and improvements in the position of women. The best answers developed their reasons and linked them to why women were having fewer children. Candidates who identified more than two reasons often did not develop the reasons and tended to score lower marks. Reasons were sometimes blurred. Answers which referred to the alleged increases in abortions did not score highly as the increase may be minimal. Candidates sometimes gave the impression that no-one is getting married or having children today. Answers with sociological concepts and appropriate language were likely to score the highest marks. Some candidates wrote lengthy introductions which did not score them any extra marks.

Q.4 **(d)** This is potentially a difficult question and different in format from previous examinations. Candidates were required to explain and discuss different views and sociological theories on the view in the question. Most candidates were able to do this successfully and the level of understanding of sociological theories in many answers was very pleasing. Very few candidates left this blank, with the weaker candidates gaining some marks by discussing/comparing differences in upbringing in two parent and one parent families. Most candidates were able to compare the functionalist view with the Marxist and the Feminist view or the growth in family diversity. Some candidates were confused over the difference in the functionalist and the Marxist position, thinking that Marxists favoured the nuclear family because it kept the rich in power! Some candidates included Willmott and Young as critics of the functionalist view whereas the symmetrical family is a development in the nuclear family not an alternative. Some candidates were amazing in their depth of knowledge and understanding and the amount they were able to write, referring, with understanding, to Murdock, Parsons, Chester, Rapoports, Oakley, Delphy and Leonard, Engels and Zaretsky in this essay. This is heart-warming at this level. The best candidates used the different views to criticise the functionalist view, rather than just explaining them and were also able to evaluate each view.

Q.5 **(a)** Most candidates were able to describe one material factor, the most common being lack of money to afford equipment or a quiet space to study/ diet. The best responses clearly linked the factor to attainment. A few confused material with cultural factors.

Q.5 **(b)** Many candidates were familiar with the functionalist view and were able to cite transmission of norms and values; preparation for work; bridge between the home and the school; meritocracy and/or role allocation. Some candidates were confused over the functionalist view of preparing students for work, including the correspondence theory and Bowles and Gintis who would not be happy to be included under functionalism!

Q.5 **(c)** There was a tendency in this question to refer to non-sociological or common sense reasons such as 'girls work harder than boys', 'girls are more organised' etc. There was also a tendency to explain why girls were improving their results rather than focussing on boys. The better answers referred to sociological research such as Jackson; Willis; It was a pleasing feature how many candidates referred to relevant research.

Q.5 **(d)** As with question 4d, this was a potentially difficult question. Weaker candidates confined themselves to a discussion of labelling and how harmful it could be if accepted by students. Many candidates, however, were able to compare the effects of labelling with the effects of material deprivation or cultural factors or discrimination. Many candidates discussed labelling and how it led to anti-school subcultures. Some quoted Willis and his research on anti-school subcultures. Willis, however, didn't link anti-school subcultures to labelling but a deliberate decision made by the boys to reject education. The very best candidates were able to point out this difference and use Willis to evaluate labelling theory. That is superb at this level. It was also very pleasing to note how much research formed opinion in this essay with many candidates writing about Hargreaves; Ball; Becker; Keddie; Halsey; Bourdieu and many others. Candidates who merely summarised the views lost AO3 marks. The most impressive responses directly evaluated the views i.e. labels can be rejected; or policies to combat material deprivation and then came to a judgement.

Q.6 **(a)** Many candidates were aware that a primary method is where the researchers collect the data themselves although some thought it was the main method or the first method.

Q.6 **(b)** Very few answers linked the strengths to the research brief of teenagers. Some candidates referred to questionnaires being valid and reliable without explaining why. This does not demonstrate any understanding.

Q.6 **(c)** Responses to this question were mixed. Some were weak and undeveloped with little use of sociological language/concepts. Better answers referred to the strengths and weaknesses of different types of observation and linked the strengths and weaknesses to the concepts of validity; ethics; representativeness etc. Some candidates strung concepts together or used concepts without explanation.

Summary of key points

- Candidates coped well with the increased content of the specifications and the greater emphasis on theory.
- The more successful candidates used sociological terms and concepts with understanding.
- There was a pleasing knowledge and understanding of sociological theories.
- Many candidates were able to quote sociologists and their research with accuracy, using their evidence to back up their points.

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SOCIOLOGY

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Summer 2019

COMPONENT 2: UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL STRUCTURES

General Comments

This was the first year in which this paper was assessed and provided a suitable level of challenge for candidates sitting this exam. The format of the paper included some continuity with the previous syllabus, including the opening section, use of source material and a mixture of shorter questions followed by those requiring extended writing. The volume of the syllabus content itself is larger than the previous syllabus and some of the content is academically more challenging. For instance, candidates were asked questions directly about theories, whereas the previous syllabus would have made this implicit. Candidates had to study an extra topic compared to the legacy syllabus. This makes the paper less accessible, although the demands of the tasks themselves were comparable to the legacy syllabus.

Research Methods on this paper had different syllabus content compared to the legacy syllabus yet was arguably no more demanding or less accessible. The exception to this would be the mental processes required on the 6 mark evaluation question. Crime and Stratification presented more challenge than the comparable questions on the legacy syllabus.

There were some remarkable responses on a paper largely sat by 16 year olds, who dealt with difficult academic concepts well and already presented themselves as strong candidates for the next level of study. Less able candidates also showed a level of knowledge and understanding showing that study of sociology had benefitted their understanding of the social world. The paper was successful in differentiating the performance of candidates and provided a good measure of performance. The paper assessed the lower order and higher order skills successfully with questions demanding all three skill areas. The mental processes required by the 9 and 16 mark questions required candidates to show all skills.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1   Most candidates were able to claim all four marks. The most common error was on part b where candidates mistook the description of Durkheim for Weber.

Q.2   **(a)**   Almost all candidates identified under 18 accurately.

Q.2   **(b)**   Most of the candidates were able to carry out the calculation resulting in an answer of £3.63. Some candidates made errors on the calculation, but this was a minority.

Q.2 **(c)** The most successful answers noted that the minimum wage rises with a person's age. They then backed this up with statistics drawn from the source. Candidates who gained all four marks also added that the other key pattern was that the amount the minimum wage goes up by decreases with age and backed this with statistics.

The most common error was in attempting to explain the reasons for the difference in the minimum wage. This was not required by the command word of describe, so candidates were not rewarded for this aspect of their answer.

Q.3 **(a)** Ageism was understood by most candidates and candidates were rewarded for reference to prejudice, discrimination or both. Examples supported the gaining of the second mark in most cases. although some of these were vague.

Q.3 **(b)** The stronger responses packed their answers with relevant sociological terms and always referred clearly to the role of the media in this process. Strong examples, such as Islamophobia or reference to Stanley Cohen's classic study also supported strong answers.

Q.3 **(c)** Stronger responses referred to lots of key terms related to old age and teenagers. These included discrimination, scapegoating, stereotyping, moral panics and folk devils. Some successfully related to crime and deviance. A minority referred to discrimination towards other groups which did not gain credit in this instance. Understanding the measures taken to reduce age discrimination might have helped more candidates access the AO3 evaluation marks.

Q.4 **(a)** This question which could have featured on the legacy syllabus appeared to throw some candidates, who were fairly vague. Stronger responses recognised that wages from work were just one form of income and included pension and benefits in their response. There was also some confusion with wealth.

Q.4 **(b)** Stronger responses referred to the culture of poverty or cycle of deprivation and explained these in detail. Others referred to social problems, such as unemployment, inflation and others referred successfully to different types of poverty. Education and discrimination also featured successfully. There were less answers which factored in contemporary working patterns such as zero hours contracts and the gig economy. Candidates were almost all able to access the question.

Q.4 **(c)** Again almost all candidates were able to access the question and enjoy some success. Many successful responses referred to the ability to access private education explaining the benefits of this. Health was the other most successful area with better diet and private health care key features of these answers. Some candidates gave basic responses including these answers which cost marks. Stronger candidates developed these ideas or gave examples.

Q.4 **(d)** Most candidates had a basic understanding of some Marxist ideas. Stronger responses featured a range of terminology and linked these to more contemporary ideas, such as consumerism. Some responses were weaker and confused other theories. Many candidates included Weber, functionalism or feminism as comparative theories enabling discussion. This would have helped many other candidates improve their grade.

Q.5 **(a)** This was the question that most candidates struggled with. Many knew the counter term of social exclusion but did not really understand the idea of social inclusion as an active attempt to involve outsider groups in society. Knowing examples helped candidates to pick up marks even when they could not define the term well. Studies of practical examples of social inclusion could have improved performance.

Q.5 **(b)** Social exclusion was answered much more confidently by candidates. Most were able to describe two ways, such as the lack of provision or actually being left out due to prejudice. Greater knowledge of measures to make reasonable adjustments would improve performance.

Q.5 **(c)** This question produced some good discussion and was answered fairly successfully. Successful responses often drew from the topic of the family and referred to dual burden and triple shift. Occasionally some candidates refer back a little too much to historical changes, such as universal suffrage relying on this. The strongest answers also referred to work including the gender pay gap, glass ceiling or referred to inequality in the media representation of men and women.

Q.6 **(a)** Most candidates understood the term and gave examples or described it using terminology, such as stereotyping. Stronger responses did both.

Q.6 **(b)** Generally, this question was answered in detail making reference to informal and formal social control, sanctions and strongest answers referring to theoretical ideas, such as anomie of the Marxist view.

Q.6 **(c)** Candidates had good ideas for this question. Some referred to statistics and others used the ideas of greater social control of females, male socialisation or the chivalry factor as their main ideas. Stronger answers developed these ideas and gave good examples. Performance could be improved for weaker candidates through a greater grasp of detail.

Q.6 **(d)** This question yielded a wide range of responses which were valid and gave candidates the opportunity to show their knowledge. Some referred to the official statistics debate and recognised the link to the earlier typical offender question. This enabled a good discussion in the difficulties in knowing. The Marxist view was also a common approach with many reference to corporate crime and white collar being ignored. Some successfully included these as well as commentary on gender, through the chivalry factor or ethnicity and institutional racism.

Another style of response used Merton, Cohen, Matza, Chambliss or other studies to challenge or support the statement. This was generally done successfully.

Stronger answers referred back to the question title often. The question was challenging as it contained different groups which all needed reference. Some students focussed mainly on class or gender.

Q.7 **(a)** Most candidates easily gained a mark for this question. Common mistakes were to use the general term survey which was not awarded a mark as too general. Some also wrote the names of different sampling methods as a response. Performance could be improved by candidates making sure they choose specific research methods, such as unstructured interview. This will support them on the following questions.

Q.7 **(b) and (c)**

Both of these questions were answered most strongly when they referred to the specific research situation of social media and youth. Candidates performance could be improved had they recognised that this aspect of paper two is research methods applied. Therefore, they need to make links, e.g. 'An online questionnaire would be a good choice of method as this will be easy for young people to access, Young people enjoy going online and are more likely to complete this increasing your response rate. This may make the sample larger and more representative.'

Q.7 **(d)** Stronger responses recognised the value of mixing methods to increase reliability and validity or to gain both quantitative and qualitative data. Also useful was the idea that mixing methods may overcome the weaknesses of one method by combining two. This question was new to this syllabus and presented a challenge for candidates. Candidates with higher levels of understanding of research methods were able to deal with this better.

Summary of key points

- Candidates have been well prepared for a syllabus that has a large amount of content.
- Candidates have dealt well with concepts, theories and studies that previously may have been studies at a higher level.
- Candidates have a lot of key terms to learn but learning the main terms well is the strongest foundation for a strong pass.
- The range of marks awarded is greater than previously, yet the paper has been accessible to almost all candidates that sat the exam.