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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCSE SOCIOLOGY**

**SUMMER 2023**

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## **SOCIOLOGY**

### **GCSE**

**Summer 2023**

#### **UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL PROCESSES**

##### **General Comments**

This paper was the second full examination since the pandemic and the cancellation of the exams in 2020 and 2021. In fact, this is only the third summer examination session for this syllabus. The paper provided a suitable level of challenge for the candidates sitting this exam. Candidates were assessed on a suitable range of aspects of the syllabus. The paper was as academically challenging as the 2019 and 2022 papers and required knowledge of a breadth of theories, concepts and studies.

The layout of the paper was improved and it appeared that very few candidates needed to attach extra pages. This made online marking more straightforward.

There were some remarkable responses from a cohort whose progress has been affected significantly by the pandemic. The general view is that a proportion of weaker candidates found the paper difficult and wrote limited responses. It is not clear whether this may be a result of gaps caused by the pandemic. When it is available, item level data may help with this. For instance, it appeared that there were some questions where a minority was not able to tackle the questions, perhaps not being familiar with the terminology. However, most candidates tackled the 15-mark questions on education and family which seemed to be accessible for almost all candidates. Marking the methodology section fairly is difficult as many candidates seem to lose the thread of the question or lack understanding of the term on 6 b and c. Positive marking was applied to reward candidates for their efforts to apply knowledge.

The paper assessed the higher order skills successfully with questions demanding all three learning objectives.

##### **Comments on individual questions/sections**

Most candidates were able to claim all four marks, but there were a sizeable minority unable to accurately choose values mistaking this for status.

- Q.2
- (a) Almost all candidates were able to define status and/or give an example. Some were very basic definitions, but most were able to refer to 'importance' or 'position in society'.
  - (b) Most of the candidates were able to identify an aspect of life. Some paraphrased from the item which was acceptable.
  - (c) The most successful answers used the idea of status being part of identity or influencing other outcomes, such as job or wealth. Others referred to it as a means of motivating people in society drawing on functionalist views.
  - (d) Many candidates simply presented their knowledge and understanding of both ascribed and status alongside each other. Stronger candidates addressed and identified the key difference e.g., having to work/not work.

Sometimes the use of a connective, such as whereas might help candidates with this process, but examiners had to be sure that they really had explained the difference. Multiple examples were not a problem for candidates here but were also needed to achieve all 4 marks.

- Q.3 (a) The term socialisation was well known to the candidates. Most candidates were able to define the term and added detail of the process, including the description of agencies of socialisation and what they did.
- (b) The stronger responses used relevant sociological arguments and applied accurate examples of feral children and cultural diversity as reasons for sociologists support of nurture theory. The most common error was where students tried to explain why nurture itself was important. They will have been given some credit for this but were not fully addressing the question.
- (c) Stronger responses referred to key terms related to social control and cohesion. These included social order, social cohesion, anomie and others. Weaker answers just wrote in a common-sense style.
- Q.4 (a) This question was generally answered well. Stronger candidates added detail to the definition outlining the way that cohabitation had increased or that it may be a trial marriage.
- (b) Stronger responses referred to at least two ways that Marxists argue that the family benefits capitalism. These included the socialisation of children into becoming obedient workers, Zaretsky, consumerism and 'pester power' or ensuring the inheritance of wealth. Candidates were almost all able to access the question.
- (c) Again candidates were almost all able to access the question and enjoy some success. Many successful responses referred to secularisation, increase in cohabitation, feminism and the growing independence of marriage. cost, contraception, decline in marriage, fear of divorce and changes in norms and values. Stronger candidates developed these ideas and showed more detailed information and use of sociological terms.
- (d) This question saw candidates answer in two main ways. Some successfully created a theoretical debate using the ideas of functionalism, Marxism, New Right and feminism. This was generally very successful and candidates' detail on functionalism was particularly good. The second way tended to be less successful, but was still acceptable. These candidates saw the debate as nuclear families versus same sex families. The stronger answers linked this to the ideas of the New Right or the Rapoport. Some very strong candidates were able to link theory with the debate about family type. The question was very accessible to all candidates it seemed.
- Q.5 (a) This was a question that some candidates struggled with. Stronger answers referred to cultural capital, Bernstein's restricted and elaborated codes or different parental expectations and aspirations. Weaker answers saw it as referring to particular ethnic groups and possibly about racism.

- (b) Stronger candidates cited Becky Francis and Carolyn Jackson alongside hidden curriculum, gendered subjects, disproportionate numbers of male headteachers and boys behaviour dominating the teachers attention. Candidates seemed familiar with the concept of patriarchy.
  - (c) This question produced some very good answers linking material factors to cultural factors successfully or referred to Halsey. This generally allowed for a more sociological feel to the answers. Other successful responses wrote in more detail about the implications of poor housing or not being able to buy a house in a good catchment area. Some also cleverly linked to problems with the funding of schools themselves rather than individual children. The most common mistakes were in writing about cultural factors rather than material factors and a small minority of candidates did not understand the term material factors.
  - (d) This question was received well and again proved to be very accessible. Successful candidates were able to use numerous sociological ideas about the reasons for either boys underachievement or girls doing better than boys. Core arguments used successfully were feminism and greater opportunities for women, laddish subcultures, peer pressure, anti-school subcultures, crisis of masculinity and labelling. Perhaps an area for development for this and similar questions may be for candidates to discuss the relative importance of reasons to add marks for AO3. One common error was responses that became side-tracked into a discussion of whether girls were doing better than boys. This tended to move away from discussion of the reasons for boys' underachievement.
- Q.6
- (a) Most candidates were able to explain the term secondary data clearly. Stronger candidates clearly gave examples and referred to quantitative and qualitative data.
  - (b) Generally, this question was answered in a basic fashion and did not use sociological terminology but referred to time and cost only. Stronger answers spotted the advantage of avoiding ethical problems and referred to informed consent, vulnerability of schoolchildren, permission, gatekeepers and more. A common error was not to refer to the item at all.
  - (c) Stronger answers displayed their knowledge of different types of observation and wrote about the strengths and weaknesses of covert, overt and participant. They also created more of a sense of discussion. It would be fair to say that candidates find methodology difficult.

## **Summary of key points**

1. Stronger candidates had detailed knowledge of sociological theories, concepts and studies.
2. Candidates should always use sociological terms as much as possible to reach higher mark bands.
3. Candidates are advised to read questions carefully. On the methodology section make sure you refer to the item where this is required.
4. For 12 and 15 mark questions, candidates should discuss the relative strengths of different arguments to gain more AO3 marks

## **SOCIOLOGY**

### **GCSE**

**Summer 2023**

#### **UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL STRUCTURES**

##### **General Comments**

This paper was the second of two for the second full examination since the pandemic and the cancellation of the exams in 2020 and 2021. This is the third summer examination session for this syllabus. The paper provided a suitable level of challenge for the candidates sitting this exam. The questions asked allowed candidates to display a range of theories, concepts and studies in their answers.

The layout of the paper was much improved. Less students wrote on extra pages.

There were some very pleasing responses from a cohort whose progress has been affected significantly by the pandemic. There were very few questions which candidates did not attempt and all extended writing questions seem to have been accessible.

The paper assessed the higher order skills successfully with questions demanding all three learning objectives. Candidates appeared to be able to draw ideas across topic lines including Component 1 material as well.

##### **Comments on individual questions/sections**

Most candidates were able to claim all four marks, but there was a sizeable minority unable to accurately separate self-fulfilling prophecy and stereotyping accurately.

Q.2 (a)(b) Almost all candidates were able to identify women with disabilities accurately.

Many candidates were able to identify two patterns and explain these clearly. Some missed out on full marks because they failed to provide statistics to support their answer. This item was understood more easily than last years' corresponding questions. Candidates could still improve by explaining the patterns clearly to ensure that they do not miss the marks.

Q.3 (a) Stronger candidates were able to define wealth and added detail that wealth can be inherited or added examples. Many still found it difficult to distinguish wealth from income.

(b) Stronger responses referred to key terms related to life chances such as old boys network, inheritance of wealth or private schooling. Some candidates identified the ability through these routes to better jobs with better income. Another interesting approach was to reflect on why poorer people, trapped in poverty or spending on essentials were unable to gain wealth. All of these were credited.

- (c) Candidates were able to tackle this question with confidence referring to sociological theories such as Functionalism, New Right and Marxism and related concepts. As in Component 1, Functionalism was applied notably well. One common area was to write generally about inequality rather than class inequality. In particular, focussing on feminism was costly to some, although some gained credit back by relating this back to the fact that for feminists' class is less important than gender inequality. The stronger answers added an element of discussion or a short conclusion linking things together. Candidates were almost all able to access the question.
- Q.4 (a) This question was generally answered reasonably well, and stronger answers referred to mental and physical disabilities and the fact that it may lead to discrimination.
- (b) This question about stereotypes and disabilities seemed to prove difficult for candidates. Stronger candidates were able to give examples of stereotypes with examples from the media, for example, the moral panic about disabled people claiming benefits. However many wrote about the discrimination without explaining the stereotypes.
- (c) Candidates were awarded a mark for describing a law, but fortunately many were also able to identify the Equality Act, 2020.
- (d) Again, candidates were almost all able to access the question and enjoy some success. Many successful responses referred to work, crime and to some, health. Gender and ethnicity were the most common responses and candidates seemed confident on this question. Stronger candidates compared the progress made of anti- discrimination laws and media representation with continuing patterns of discrimination.
- Q.5 (a) This question saw candidates able to use material about New Right views of dependency culture and the culture of poverty. Other successfully used Marxist ideas to describe families trapped in poverty and apply it to the question. Successful candidate all included the idea of poverty being a trap, repeated or carried on over generations. Candidates not familiar with the term found the question difficult and some did not attempt it.
- (b) The strongest answers gave detail and examples of social exclusion. There was noteworthy use of institutional racism, disability, unemployment, homelessness.
- (c) There were three main approaches to this question employed by candidates. These included a focus purely on definitions, theories and those who did both. All of these worked successfully and were awarded marks. The theory answers tended to think of the question as asking what a Marxist or Functionalist would think poverty was. There were some candidates who provided no response, but most were able to write fluently. Again, stronger answers featured ongoing evaluative comment and/or a conclusion at the end.
- Q.6 (a) All knew the term labelling and could define it. Development included the ability to give examples, name theorists or link to further concepts including self-fulfilling prophecy.

- (b) The concept of subculture was more widely known than when it featured on last year's paper. There was a great deal of knowledge about Cohen, status frustration and the alternative norms and values of a subculture. Some linked New Right ideas successfully.
  - (c) Most students were able to make links between social class and crime. The best answers talked about moral panics, white collar and corporate crime, the concept of the typical offender and theoretical views of crime. There was also useful commentary on patterns of crime according to social class and victimisation. The question was very accessible.
  - (d) There was some crossover material with the previous question, but also with question 4d on discrimination more generally. Successful candidates took a wider view of the question and included material relating to gender, age and ethnicity as well as class. Concepts such as institutional racism, chivalry thesis and the demonisation of women were used with confidence as well as examples from the news including BLM and Stephen Lawrence.
- Q.7
- (a) Most candidates were able to name an appropriate qualitative method. The expectation is that candidates will be as precise as possible and refer to unstructured interviews or participant observation rather than simply interview or observation.
  - (b) Stronger answers referred to the suitability of the method to study climate protests using sociological language accurately. Where candidates had not chosen a qualitative method in 7a examiners employed positive marking to award marks where possible.
  - (c) This question was dealt with by many candidates referring to practical and ethical issues. Successful candidates linked their chosen research method to study a large crowd at a protest march. Interestingly, some ended up concluding that they had chosen unwisely in 7a and would have been better served with a qualitative method. An area for improvement would be the accurate use of sociological terminology and more discussion of the problems and possibly ways of dealing with these.

### Summary of key points

1. Stronger candidates had detailed knowledge of sociological theories, concepts and studies.
2. Candidates should always use sociological terms as much as possible to reach higher mark bands.
3. For the 9 mark questions, candidates would benefit from more evaluative language and/or the use of a short conclusion.
4. For the 6 mark question, candidates would benefit from creating more discussion around the question comparing the merits of different arguments.



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