GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

GCE
SOCIOLOGY
AS/Advanced

SUMMER 2019

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SOCIOLOGY

General Certificate of Education

Summer 2019

Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

UNIT 1: ACQUIRING CULTURE

General Comments

The examining team were mainly satisfied with the standards achieved in this series of examinations. Indeed, standards achieved by some candidates were exceptional and teachers and centres should be congratulated on the quality achieved. Most candidates were able to demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of the topics covered. The very best answers demonstrated the higher order skills of analysis and evaluation most effectively.

There were however some very brief responses to essay questions and where this was the case it had a significant impact on the total mark for the paper.

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

Examiners reported: only a few centres appeared to have requested candidates complete the grid on the front of the answer booklet to show which questions had been answered (in what order); it would be helpful if candidates could be reminded to do this. Many candidates did not label their answers clearly inside the booklet (or labelled them incorrectly); it would be helpful if candidates were reminded of the importance of doing this accurately.

Overall, candidates appeared to demonstrate appropriate time allocation to each section of the paper. There were a minority of cases where not enough time had been devoted to the last, essay question.

There was a great deal of quite dated sociology cited, for example, discussing 1950s evidence as if it were current. This was often presented in the 'x' disagrees with 'y' fashion when 'x' came decades before 'y'. An awareness of the chronology of theory/evidence, and thus of social change, would benefit candidates for AO2 and AO3.

Centres are advised to remind candidates to take careful note of command words so that they respond appropriately in their answers. Where an assessment is required the answer should not be descriptive in tone.

The level of English and, where appropriate, Welsh was good.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Question 1

Section (a)
Most candidates were able to score 3 marks or more for this question. Those who failed to score full marks either failed to offer a clear definition of the term, did not use the item, or did both.

Section (b)

Centres are advised to take careful note of this report and of previous reports to ensure that candidates understand the requirements of this question.

Most candidates were able to identify two agents of socialisation and most focused on the process as the task required. These candidates were therefore, able to access Band 4 marks. Most candidates wrote about family, peer groups or education. Good answers included concepts such as canalisation, manipulation, verbal appellations, imitation, sanctions, role modelling and peer pressure, showing a clear understanding of how these agents of socialisation influenced young people. However, a significant minority failed to explain how agents pass on norms and values. Those who identified 'media' gave good answers, choosing examples such as role modelling, imitation and the hypodermic syringe model. However, those who chose 'religion' rarely focused on how it controlled behaviour. When candidates did not choose 'peer group' as an agent, very few were able to incorporate the item effectively. It was only the stronger candidates who were able to apply it to 'family', 'education' or 'media'. Some candidates conflated education and peer group in an attempt to apply the item.

Where candidates referred to more than one process whilst talking about one of the agents of socialisation and also had process in the other agent they could access the full range of marks for AO1. Using the agent that appears in the item is the most effective way to ensure that the item is used, so giving potential access to Band 4 for AO2. 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. Centres new to the specification should take note of this important point.

Question 2-Families and Culture

Compulsory questions

Q.2 (a) (i) This was a case of candidates knowing or not knowing this term. Nevertheless, many candidates were awarded full marks. Answers also, varied from centre to centre. Candidates from some centres had a clear understanding of 'dual burden', but a significant majority from other centres gave definitions which either confused it with 'triple shift' or did not know what it meant. Some thought it referred to single parents, or both parents sharing tasks, or housewives staying at home and doing both housework and child care. Others thought it meant looking after children and older relatives.

Q.2 (a) (ii) Many answers to this question were disappointing. Some did not know what a beanpole family is, whilst others were unable to explain why they exist. Most candidates could identify two reasons for the increase of beanpole families. However, a significant number of answers lacked the supporting evidence needed to reach Band 3. It is necessary to support each reason with relevant evidence followed by an explanation of how the evidence supports the reason offered. Nevertheless, many candidates offered insightful answers in which they effectively utilised their knowledge and understanding of demographic change but evidence was sadly lacking which left what could have been effective responses moving towards the anecdotal rather than the sociological response. This question is a great skill builder as it can help students to learn how to use evidence effectively and this has a positive impact on the quality of their essays. The use of evidence to support ideas in essays provides a platform for evaluative commentary; a skill which was sadly lacking in many of the essays that we saw.

Essays

Family and households

Q.2 **(b)/(c)** By far the most popular choice of essay was 2b and yet responses were often disappointing. Some candidates failed to recognise the view, many giving descriptive accounts of various theoretical views of the family in a list like fashion; this was not the task. Yet again those candidates who were able to effectively use evidence to argue for and against were the ones accessing the higher mark bands. Candidates who did not explicitly evaluate the theories described and instead wrote descriptive accounts of different theories did not score highly in AO3.

The essay on divorce was largely not answered well in spite of it being very accessible. Many had at best patchy knowledge of laws relating to divorce. The best essays examined a range of factors that have contributed to rising divorce and then weighing them up against the law so that a judgement could be made on the influence of the law on rising divorce rates. Some approached it as though it were a 2aii question. Short responses were a particular feature this year. Taking time restrictions into account, candidates should try to engage in a detailed debate.

Youth Cultures

Q.3 **(a)** **(i)** Most answers could give a partial definition of spectacular youth subcultures. Better answers added detail to the definition by identifying features & examples of subcultures.

Q.3 **(a)** **(ii)** This question was mainly answered quite well. Most were able to identify two reasons why youth cultures are linked to males, 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 because of the lack of supporting evidence; see comments on 2aii.

Q.3 **(b)** This was the least popular option and tended to be chosen by the stronger candidates. Most who chose this question had a good understanding of neo-tribes and that it is a postmodernist concept. They were able to evaluate using other theories, e.g., Marxism and feminism, and provide appropriate writers/studies from various sides of the debate, giving examples of evidence that spectacular youth cultures might still be present today, e.g. Goths & Skinheads.

Q.3 **(c)** Most candidates chose this option and, unfortunately, few offered detailed discussions. Many candidates could define 'rite of passage' and most included Parsons and functionalism. Some also included Eisenstadt. Better answers included alternative debates from Marxism, feminism or postmodernism, but these were in the minority. Some queried whether it is only youth who belong to these cultures, e.g. older people still dressing as Goths, Rockers or Skinheads. Weaker answers tended to be descriptive, lost focus and failed to include evaluative points which resulted in average rather than high marks.

As with the Family and Households option, candidates who were able to write effective essays were the ones who did well on this paper.

Q.3 **(a)** **(i)** This question was answered well by some candidates but once again there were a significant number of weak answers in which it was evident that candidates did not understand the focus of the task. Answers that merely wrote descriptive accounts of theories of family, even if they were feminist theories, did not score highly in AO2 or AO3. Centres should be advised that a significant number of candidates were unable to construct effective discussions. There was often a distinct lack of evidence to support or reject ideas and, as a result, candidates failed to secure high level marks for AO2 or AO3. Some candidates seemed to struggle with high level analysis and evaluation and centres should be aware of the importance of these skills. Descriptive accounts of opposing theories do not allow candidates to achieve high marks for AO3 as this constitutes juxtaposition and results in a low Band 3 AO3 mark. A significant number of candidates presented essays that were almost entirely one sided, arguing for feminist theories of family rather than evaluating them as the command words required.

2. **(c)** This essay required candidates to examine how diversity has affected family relationships. Some candidates did this very well whilst others gave lengthy accounts of the reasons for diversity, ignoring how relationships may have been affected. So, there were some very good and very weak answers to this question.

Youth Culture

3. **(b)** There were some very good responses to this question and many candidates were very highly rewarded for their precise and detailed knowledge and understanding. However, there were also a significant number of candidates who demonstrated very tentative knowledge and even less understanding and as a result were appropriately rewarded. The best essays here examined the pros and cons of postmodern views of youth culture rather than merely describing them. They then attempted to make a judgement on the value of these ideas and as such were able to access the higher mark bands for AO3.

3. **(c)** Candidates either presented a well-supported, well-informed discussion or merely described why young people join youth cultures which sometimes, by chance, included some reference to deviance. Candidates must be aware that to score highly they must be selective in the knowledge they utilise so that it is relevant to the discussion.

Summary of key points

- understand the skills.
- understand the weighting of marks and how much time to spend on each question.
- understand the command words.
- use evidence to improve the quality of essays.

SOCIOLOGY

General Certificate of Education

Summer 2019

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UNIT 2: UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY AND METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

General Comments

Most candidates responded well to this paper having been effectively prepared by their centres. Teachers and candidates should be congratulated on the quality of work produced. The ability of the cohort mirrored the broad ability range of previous years with candidates achieving a spread of Band 4 to Band 1 answers across the three skill areas; AO1, AO2, AO3.

Accessibility of tasks/items: Item Level Data suggests Q2 (a)(i) was perhaps more challenging than in previous series.

The demands of the tasks/items vary throughout the paper:

Q1 (a) worth 5 marks is a straightforward question. AO1 and AO2 skills were assessed. This question was accessible to all candidates.

Questions 1(b), 2/3/4 (a) (ii) were also accessible to a broad range of candidates. AO1 and AO2 skills were assessed.

Questions 2/3/4 (a) (i) involved numerical data interpretation and to an extent reflect centre preparation of candidates. AO1 and AO2 skills were assessed.

Question 1(c) and questions 2/3/4 (b) and(c) were essay questions and presented higher order challenges for candidates. These questions assessed proficiency on all three skill areas AO1, AO2, AO3, with the latter skill area posing the highest level of challenge.

Candidates were generally able to demonstrate some knowledge and understanding across the range of questions. As in previous years, in the very best answers, candidates were confident in manipulating previously unseen data – both prose and numerical. Furthermore, candidates who scored highly made good use of empirical evidence and contemporary debates and examples in addition to demonstrating proficiency in all three skills areas in essays: AO1, AO2 and AO3.

It was pleasing to note that many centres have emphasised the importance of effective time management, with most candidates completing the final essay question, which attracts 30 marks, although in centres where candidates attempted the 30-mark question first, some candidates spend too long on the essay and ran out of time.

Candidates should continue to be encouraged to engage in sustained rather than juxtaposed evaluation in the 20 and 30-mark essay questions.

There were very few rubric errors. The level of English and, where appropriate, Welsh was good.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Question 1 - Compulsory

Q.1 **(a)** Most candidates had been well versed in how to respond to this question. Many candidates had some understanding of the term qualitative data. The stronger candidates defined qualitative data in detail and then provided two or three knowledge points to support their understanding. Some candidates made the link with interpretivists, however, a significant minority suggested positivist sociologists favour qualitative data. This appeared to be a centre effect. While most candidates used the item, a significant number briefly mentioned or copied the item to explain a point about qualitative and this precluded them from achieving full marks. An alternative approach to securing full AO2 marks is to refer to the Item and include a reference to another appropriate study.

Q.1 **(b)** The majority were able to identify at least one ethical issue sociologists might face when conducting research and there were some pleasing responses. Candidates who achieved the highest marks clearly structured their answers into two separate issues. However, a significant minority provided two very similar issues with overlapping content. A common error was to suggest bias was an ethical issue, confusing ethical factors with validity. Laud Humphries and James Patrick were the most common relevant studies used to explain an ethical issue. Some candidates either did not refer to or made very brief references to the item, resulting in lower AO2 marks. Candidates who made clear references to the item and supported their knowledge with clear examples/studies were more likely to achieve the highest AO2 marks.

Q.1 **(c)** Most answers showed an understanding of semi-structured interviews, although the answers varied significantly in breadth and depth. Many candidates were able to identify the weaknesses of semi-structured interviews effectively; some were able to balance this with a detailed range of strengths – this imbalance was a consistent reason for candidates missing out on the highest marks. There remains a tendency to juxtapose evaluative points, i.e. describe a list of strengths, then a list of weaknesses. Many candidates referred to appropriate concepts such as qualitative data and validity, but these were sometimes left undeveloped. It might be helpful if candidates were advised to avoid using the concepts validity and reliability in the same sentence. Some candidates assumed the concepts representativeness and generalisability are characteristics of the method rather than the sample. Stronger candidates referred to a range of studies that used semi-structured interviews; these studies were contextualised in relation to the question, with some candidates embedding the studies in discussions of strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, these candidates made effective use of the item.

SECTION B
Option 1 - Education [Item Level Data reveals this remains the most popular option]

Compulsory question

Q.2 **(a)** **(i)** Some candidates understood the data and gave very good answers, effectively engaging with and interpreting the data. However, some did not provide accurate interpretations of the data; a typical misinterpretation was: '81% of females choose Medicine' this is not accurate, as it suggests 81% of females generally rather than 81% of students who studied/achieved the qualification in medicine were female. A significant minority of candidates gave reasons for the data, which was not required. Those who scored lower marks tended to briefly state a percentage rather than calculate a difference e.g. between males and females, resulting in descriptive answers. Stronger answers referred to an overall difference between the two groups and then made accurate references to other trends. It might be useful for candidates to describe the pattern/trend, support with evidence from the graph and then refer to any percentage/percentage point differences.

Q.2 **(a)** **(ii)** Most candidates provided two clear reasons for the relationship between subject choices and gender. A significant minority interpreted the question as one pertaining to educational achievement. Strong answers referred to sociological reasons which were outlined, explained and supported with reference to writers or studies, for example Oakley, Culley, McCabe, Connell and Clarricoates. Lower achieving candidates made little or no reference to studies. Candidates could draw on their knowledge and understanding required in the debates section of the specification to answer this question. Many candidates produced clearly structured answers. There is no requirement to provide an opening paragraph describing trends. A minority of candidates provided more than two reasons, and this would have impacted on timing elsewhere.

Q.2 **(b)** Item Level Data reveals this was the most popular essay question and required candidates to discuss functionalist explanations of education. There were many pleasing responses. Higher scoring candidates were able to discuss a range of Functionalist explanations and to examine these in detail, with Durkheim, Parsons and Davis and Moore the most likely references. Those who scored the highest demonstrated higher order essay writing techniques with high level evaluative and analytical style. Contextualised evaluation was evident in these answers, with a range of evaluation taken from Marxist, feminist, interactionist, postmodern and New Right critiques. For some candidates, evaluation continues to be characterised by juxtaposition. The best answers adopted an evaluative tone throughout.

Q.2 **(c)** Item Level Data suggests this question was also popular and was generally well addressed, with a variety of responses. There were fewer excellent answers than Q.2(b). Many candidates had a breadth of knowledge about how the home influenced educational achievement, with references to material deprivation, cultural deprivation, cultural capital, linguistics. For many, however, there was a missed opportunity to evaluate the view in a sustained manner. Stronger candidates considered views regarding home as the main variable influencing educational achievement of different class groups and also effectively considered the school as the main influence. A significant number of responses were one sided. Some candidates wrote long paragraphs linked to functionalism, Marxism, gender and ethnicity without applying them to the question. Some lower achieving answers were anecdotal. Most evaluation continues to be juxtaposed and candidates would benefit from further practice of this competency. There were nevertheless some very high-quality responses which drew upon a range of studies such as Feinstein, Sewell, Bourdieu, Ball, Bernstein, Archer and Francis, Smith and Noble.

Option 2 – Media (Item Level Data reveals this is the second most popular option)

Compulsory question

Q.3 **(a)** **(i)** Most candidates understood the data in the graph and were able to describe the trends regarding sources of news. Stronger answers referred to an overall trend such as the dominance of the BBC across a range of platforms and then made accurate references to other trends. Many made comparative points between the different sources of news enabling more candidates to access band 3 marks than in previous years. Some candidates were able to refer to percentage point differences gaining extra AO2 marks. Some candidates continue to give 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.

Q.3. **(a)** **(ii)** The good answers clearly identified two, clear 'reasons'. Higher achieving candidates choose two sociological reasons which were outlined, explained and supported with reference to writers or studies for example: technological advance and an interactive relationship - Spencer-Thomas; news media designed to meet needs of different audiences - Chandler, Buckingham, Moore; audience power - Whale; passive audience - Chandler, Buckingham. Candidates could draw on their knowledge and understanding required in the debates section of the specification to answer this question. Teachers should be advised that encouraging students to write in a clearly structured way often enhances the clarity of their answers. There is no requirement to provide an opening paragraph describing trends. Lower achieving candidates continue to describe a number of reasons in insufficient detail. A significant number of responses relied heavily on common sense ideas and anecdotal references and examples. Such answers did not score high marks.

Q.3 **(b)** Item Level Data reveals this was a less popular but accessible question which required candidates to discuss sociological explanations of media representations of social class. To do this effectively candidates need to consider the evidence with commentary on what the evidence suggests. Some candidates strayed away from a focus on social class and lost marks accordingly. Most candidates were able to construct a debate; while the best answers examined the sociological explanations in a detailed evaluative way. The highest achievers were able to examine explanations such as Marxism, neo-Marxism, pluralism. Also, higher achieving candidates referred to the working class and the middle class with some also considering upper class and 'underclass' representations. The strongest candidates were able to evaluate theoretical explanations, although a significant minority juxtaposed different explanations, resulting in lower AO3 marks.

Q.3 **(c)** The focus here was on a consideration of the role of the media in the creation of moral panics. This was the more popular media question according to the Item Level Data. Many candidates were familiar with the concept of a moral panic with references to Cohen and/or Goode and Ben-Yehuda. Many candidates referred to classic and contemporary examples effectively, although there was a tendency for lower achieving candidates to produce descriptive rather than analytical responses. The best answers examined the role of the media and also considered other influences on the creation of moral panics such as the police/state, and the notion that the media reflects reality. Higher achieving answers considered a range of theoretical views such as interactionist, Marxist, neo-Marxist views with some referring to alternative views such as the pluralist and postmodern and views. Some candidates were able to engage in high level sophisticated and well supported lines of debate and these were highly rewarded in each skill domain, lower achievers produced common sense answers, assertive answers, lacking reference to empirical evidence and/or theory.

Option 3 – Religion [the less popular option according to Item Level Data]

Compulsory question

Q.4 **(a)** **(i)** Despite being attempted by few candidates, most understood the data and gave good answers. Lower scoring candidates made fewer comparisons, while stronger answers referred to an overall trend, for example those brought up Roman Catholic were most likely to keep their religious affiliation at 62%, whereas those brought up Church of England/Anglican and other Christian groups both had 49% remaining in the religion they were brought up in. This was a difference of 13 percentage points. The candidates then made accurate references to other trends. However, not all provided the comparative points which would enable them to access band 3 marks. A significant number of candidates continue to give reasons for the trends, which was not required. Those who scored lower marks just quoted the percentages resulting in descriptive answers. In most cases points were supported with reference to the data.

Q.4 (a) (ii) High achieving candidates clearly identified two 'reasons', such as modernisation/growth of rationale scientific thought and the disengagement of the church and the state. The best answers referred to sociological reasons which were outlined, explained and supported with reference to writers or studies, for example Weber, Bruce, Wilson, Parsons. Candidates could draw on their knowledge and understanding required in the debates section of the specification to answer this question. Teachers should be advised that encouraging students to write in a clearly structured way usually enhances the clarity of their answers. There is no requirement to provide an opening paragraph describing trends. Lower achieving candidates often described a number of reasons in insufficient detail.

Q.4 (b) Item Level data reveals very few candidates attempted this question. The candidates were required to examine and make a judgement on Weberian explanations of religion in society. The answers were generally focused. In lower scoring answers knowledge of Weberian explanations lacked breadth and depth, although most answers contained some knowledge, with references to the 'spirit of capitalism' and the 'protestant work ethic'. Those who scored the highest demonstrated an understanding of the intricacies of the Weberian views debate and were able to offer alternative perspectives such as Marxism, neo-Marxism, functionalism. Excellent responses were characterised by higher order essay writing techniques including a high level evaluative and analytical style. Unfortunately, in many answers, evaluation continues to be characterised by juxtaposition. For example, Weberianism versus Marxism rather than a sustained debate leading to a judgement about Weberian explanations of religion in society.

Q.4 (c) Item Level Data reveals this was the slightly more popular religion question. The focus here was on a consideration of a range of sociological explanations for the relationship between age and religion. High achieving candidates successfully considered different age groups in addition to studies such as Davie, Bruce, Barker and Wilson and Modood. There was some tendency towards answers that lacked breadth and depth of knowledge, however higher achievers grappled with competing sociological explanations and considered competing interpretations of the same statistics. For lower achievers, evaluation tended to consist of a juxtaposition of ideas, some of which were based on common-sense assumptions.

Summary of key points

Essay Questions - Candidates should continue to be encouraged to engage in sustained rather than juxtaposed evaluation in the 20 and 30-mark essay questions.

Question 1 a/b/c
*When candidates copy or briefly refer to the Item rather than use the Item to address the questions, this impacts on their AO2 marks.
*To ensure precision, it might be helpful if candidates were advised to avoid using the concepts validity and reliability in the same sentence.

Q1(b), 2/3/4 (ii) Candidates who achieved the highest marks clearly structured their answers into two separate points.

Q2/3/4(a) (i) There is no requirement for candidates to give reasons for the data.

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UNIT 3: POWER AND CONTROL

General Comments

Overall, Unit 3 is of a relatively high standard and candidates are generally well prepared for the unit. It is very rare to see candidates fail to attempt questions. Rubric errors are also rare.

Option 1 – Crime and Deviance continues to be by far the most popular option (95% + of centres), with a very small number of centres opting for the Health and Disability and World Sociology options. Again, no centres opted for politics. All questions in all options are 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 is accessing these AO3 marks that seems to be most.

Generally, candidates responded well to the demands of the paper, especially given the broad range of topics explored.

Most candidates use sociological theories, concepts and evidence appropriately. Most candidates allocated their time well between all three questions – this was an improvement on the last series, although, as with the last series, perhaps candidates could spend more time on the ai) question.

Near illegible handwriting continues to be an issue for markers and centres are advised to contact the WJEC and potentially look at making alternative arrangements for candidates in these cases. Less important, though still an issue for examiners, is the lack of paragraphs used by some candidates and 'walls of writing' that can be difficult to decipher. As with previous years, in 20-mark and 40-mark questions, there was a relationship between quality and how well an answer was structured into meaningful paragraphs. Candidates who organise their essays into clear 'points', logically presented, are more likely to access the highest marks.

As with previous years, one administration issue raised by examiners was that students did not write which questions they had attempted on the front of their examination booklet which then takes examiners some time to complete.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 (a) (i)
These questions are assessed on AO1 – knowledge and understanding (4), and AO2 – application of knowledge (6). A few candidates (usually a centre effect) continue to waste time by evaluating. There is a tendency to under-answer these questions. The best prepared candidates understood the importance of providing a clear definition of the term/ concept and referred to relevant sociological examples and writers. Direct focus on the question and named, relevant sociologists are essential for top band.

Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 (a)(ii)
These questions are assessed on AO1 – knowledge and understanding (12), and AO2 – application of knowledge (8). The best answers from each option referred to and then applied a range of relevant sociological evidence and examples that directly related to the question. Again, some candidates wasted time evaluating this evidence. The use of anecdotal evidence rather than sociology appeared to be more frequent than in previous series.

Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 (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. As with last year, some centres appeared to have provided 'templates' or 'model answers' for candidates, particularly for theory essays. Examiners found that for the most part, these templates do not allow students to engage fully with the question and as such, penalised the most able candidates and confused the less able candidates.

Option 1 – Crime and Deviance

Q.1 (a) (i) As was the case with the last series, the responses to this question were weaker than expected. The standard of responses to this question were reasonable, however, few candidates received full marks for this question. Few candidates were able to provide a clear and detailed definition of social control including formal and informal social control and utilise the work of relevant sociologists. The best candidates used sociologists such as Durkheim, Hirschi and Heidensohn very well. Some candidates failed to include any named sociologists, theory or evidence. As with the last series candidates tended to 'drift' off topic to discuss areas such as theories of crime, particularly Marxism. Some responses lacked focus and rather than discussing social control, they simply provided a definition of socialisation and how norms are transmitted through the agents of socialisation, therefore failing to properly address the question. Most candidates did not provide a sufficiently detailed response for this question for the top bands. Candidates should consider spending a little more time on this question, developing their points/examples fully.

Q.1 (a) (ii) Lots of good application to recent events
Unlike the responses to this question for the last series, most candidates failed to access the top bands for this question and did not demonstrate a detailed understanding of the influence of media on crime and deviance. It is possible that some centres did not anticipate a question on media and crime and thus failed to explore the role of media and crime, limiting the depth of responses provided by candidates. Many candidates tried to relate ethnicity, social class, gender and age patterns into this question, with some tenuous links to the role of media. Centres should be advised that all possible areas of the syllabus could be included in any of the questions.

A small number of candidates achieved top band answers, these provided significant depth of evidence, concepts and theory all directly related to the influence of media. The best answers selected a range (at least 3, usually more) of sociological evidence and examples that directly related to the media and crime, providing detailed explanations of that evidence. There were discussions of media fallacies, 'bulimic society', copycat violence as well as the more frequent moral panics and deviancy amplification and there was some good application of these theories and concepts to recent events. Many candidates were in fact only able to explain the influence of the media, using moral panics or deviancy amplification, occasionally both, however, these terms were not supported by any detailed use of examples of sociologists. Many candidates got confused between A Cohen and S Cohen and their work/concepts. Some answers were too discursive, giving a narrative description on how the media covers crime stories. Some candidates chose to focus on how the media promotes crime, referring to a range of recent drama series or documentaries with a basic description of the content of these programmes without supporting answers with specific sociological knowledge, thus only demonstrating basic knowledge. Media influencing relative deprivation was used frequently, however, although this has the potential to a strong response, a significant number of the candidates using this example failed to link it to crime and deviance. Some used sociological terms to support this point, but generally this point lacked detail. There was a lack of sociological knowledge in many of these answers.

Q.1 (b) This essay was a less popular choice and provided comparatively weaker responses, though they were significantly better than the 'weaker' essay from last year's series. Generally answered well, candidates demonstrated a detailed knowledge and understanding of the relationship between gender and crime and deviance with reference to both male and female crime.

Many candidates were able to demonstrate detailed knowledge of sociological theories and concepts, achieving top-band for knowledge and understanding, however, Anne Oakley is still most candidates' go-to feminist and some candidates referred to Otto Pollak as a feminist! A significant number of responses failed to apply and interpret these points in the context of the question, therefore appeared to simply list the various sociological theories with a description of what they say regarding gender differences in crime and deviance. This resulted in a lack of application and interpretation and application, impacting on overall marks. As the question requires the candidate to discuss the relationship between gender and crime and deviance, a significant number of candidates offered little judgement, mini-conclusions or evaluation of sociological theory throughout, and simply outlined the perspectives, having an impact on both the AO2 and AO3 marking bands. Many candidates felt providing basic/limited and juxtaposed evaluative points were sufficient thus, only providing basic or limited judgements.

Q.1 **(c)** This theory question was the most popular option and the stronger candidates showed impressive detailed knowledge of Marxism and could interpret and evaluate the ideas and concepts at a high level, sustaining these skills throughout their answers. As with previous series, clearly some centres had provided model answers for a question on Marxism which were attempted with varying degrees of success/ accuracy. Stronger answers offered detailed, often quite complex explanations, weaker answers were simplistic and brief. Many candidates simply gave a descriptive account of Marxist perspective, without providing specific Marxist theories. Therefore, responses lacked detail and evidence of understanding. A significant number of responses only included one or at most two Marxist theorists and as a result failed to provide a wide-ranging discussion of the Marxist theory of crime. There were a number of errors of attribution, with many candidates confusing points made by Marxist theorists. Moreover, a number of sociologists were wrongly identified as Marxists these included Durkheim, Merton and Becker. Although most candidates provided a detailed explanation of Marxist theory, many failed to consider alternative perspectives which develop from, or directly link to Marxism.

Most candidates attempted to evaluate, even if it was in the form or a single strength and weakness, however, as with previous years, some candidates evaluated by juxtaposing Marxism with other perspectives, but in such a way that the focus of the essay was not on Marxism/had no links back to Marxism. Many candidates made generic evaluations not linked to explanations e.g. Marxism is criticised for being too deterministic, or focused only on class. A few candidates offered a descriptive only response, void of evaluation. As always with theory questions, there was a significant number of candidates' essays just juxtaposing theories, often writing more about Functionalism than Marxism. As a result, some candidates forgot the focus of the question and purely look at different theories, writing page upon irrelevant page about what causes crime. The majority of 'conclusions' don't actually conclude, they simply repeat what has already been said rather than make an assessment.

Q.2 **(a)** **(i)** There was a range of quality of answers for this question though most were at least reasonable – well prepared candidates provided excellent, detailed definitions of risk behaviour and referred to sociology and different aspects of risk behaviour throughout. Weaker candidates tended to write less developed answers but had a basic understanding of risk behaviour.

Q.2 **(a)** **(ii)** This question was answered well overall and considerably better than this question in the previous series. Candidates provided knowledgeable answers, all with named sociologists but some more than others/better developed than others, and most focussed on male as well as female issues. This a (ii) question had the highest mean mark of all of the options but comparisons are difficult as a result of the huge disparity in numbers of candidates taking this option.

Q.2   (b)   This was, perhaps surprisingly, the more popular choice when it came to the health essays and was very well answered. Overall, what might have been thought of as a challenging question about the influence of health professionals on health and illness provided some excellent essays with detail, breadth, depth, named sociologists and sustained evaluation. This essay had the highest mean mark of all the options however, again due to the relative numbers, comparisons are difficult.

Q.2   (c)   Slightly fewer students who studied this option opted for this essay. A range of marks were awarded here but again candidates tended to do relatively well in comparison to other options. A few were exceptional with detailed AO1, accurate and purposeful selection of evidence to support and a structured and logically presented argument throughout. Otherwise the recurring issue for theory questions was evident with students using juxtaposed theories of health rather than focusing on evaluating the social construction of health and disability. AO3 tended to be underdeveloped for some candidates. Again, weaker answers lacked sociological content and were much more generalised in nature.

Option 3 – Politics
No candidates attempted this option.

Option 4 – World Sociology
Q.4   (a)   (i)   There was a range of quality of answers for this question with the majority lacking sociology knowledge that specifically addresses the meaning of debt crisis. As a result, several responses were generalised, making minimal reference to relevant sociological writers, concepts etc. Africa was referred to as an individual country in numerous responses. Few answers contained a clear definition of 'debt crisis', remained focused and referred to at least one relevant sociologist and as such the mean mark for this question was less than half marks. This is less than the equivalent question on other options however the numbers involved make comparisons difficult.

Q.4   (a)   (ii)   As with question 4a(i) answers ranged from good to very limited in terms of sociological knowledge. The best students were able to refer to a number (at least 3) of relevant pieces of sociological evidence/ examples and use them to explain the relationship between population growth and inequalities in the developing world. Few candidates appeared to understand global demographic trends accurately. The weakest answers again lacked any reference to sociology and again examples were vague (Africa often cited as a country again). Again, the mean mark for this question was less than half marks. Again, this is less than the equivalent question on other options however the numbers involved make comparisons difficult. Candidates who referred to relevant theory were able to access marks in the higher bands.

Q.4   **(b)**   This was the slightly less popular choice when it came to the essays however it produced responses of slightly higher quality in comparison to question 4c) and was comparable in terms of mean to other options. A few candidates provided answers which demonstrated a very good wide-ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding of the influence of TNCs on inequality in the developing world and were able to analyse and evaluate various perspectives on TNCs effectively, using some range of relevant examples. Weaker candidates wrote a more generalised response about the use of TNCs and often drifted off topic to focus on the subject of aid.

Q.4   **(c)**   This was the slightly more popular choice when it came to the essays however candidates produced some responses of lesser quality in comparison to question 4b). In fact, it was the worst answered essay of all the options, again with the average candidate accessing less than half of the available marks. The question focused on explanations of gender and inequality in the developing world – a straightforward question, however, few candidates provided answers which demonstrated wide-ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding of these explanations, unable to analyse and evaluate any relevant material effectively. Very few students had knowledge of feminist theories, some students muddled various theories, and many examples used were anecdotal.

Summary of key points

In terms of administration, candidates should ensure the front covers of their exam booklets are completed fully and accurately. Any student who has writing issues in exam conditions should arrange to word process their paper.

Centres must be aware that any elements of the specification can be used to generate any question, avoiding limitations on what might be asked and limiting predictability.

Candidates need to remember to include sociology in all their answers! Contemporary examples can be excellent but only when applied to relevant sociological theory/ concepts/ writers.

Candidates should spend more time on the a(i) question. Candidates should focus directly on the term stated in the question. A clear and detailed definition of the term is essential. Candidates should then strive to include relevant sociologists and make developed sociological points using examples where possible. It is worth spending 15-20 minutes answering this question.

It is still the case that AO3 is the most underdeveloped skill. Candidates should spend time on developing this skill - working on evaluation, making judgements, writing mini-conclusions to paragraphs, forming meaningful overall conclusions, looking at how different theories interlink etc. This should certainly help improve performance in this unit.

SOCIOLOGY

General Certificate of Education

Summer 2019

Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

UNIT 4: SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND APPLIED METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

General Comments

The examining team were largely satisfied with the standards achieved in this series of examinations. Indeed, standards achieved by some candidates were exceptional and teachers and centres should be congratulated on the quality achieved. Most candidates were able to demonstrate some knowledge and understanding of the topics covered. The very best answers demonstrated the higher order skills of analysis and evaluation most effectively. There were, however, some very brief responses to essay questions and where this was the case it had a significant impact on the total mark for the paper. When constructing discussions, the best candidates made good use of empirical evidence and contemporary debates. Many essays were well structured, logical and focussed.

Examiners reported: only a few centres appeared to have requested candidates complete the grid on the front of the answer booklet to show which questions had been answered (in what order); it would be helpful if candidates could be reminded to do this. Many candidates did not label their answers clearly inside the booklet (or labelled them incorrectly); it would be helpful if candidates were reminded of the importance of doing this accurately

Overall, candidates appeared to demonstrate appropriate time allocation to each section of the paper. There were a minority of cases where not enough time had been devoted to the last, essay question.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Compulsory section A

Q.1 **(a)** Most candidates were able to identify reasons why the researchers decided to use structured interviews in their research. However, some candidates confused structured interviews with unstructured interviews and, where this was the case, it was reflected in the marks awarded. The key to success in this question is context; being able to pick out the specific strengths of the method which might have been useful in helping the researchers to achieve their research aims. Many students offered generic and often inaccurate answers. Few candidates scored full marks for this question, largely because of the failure to contextualise their response.

Q.1 **(b)** Once again examiners reported that there were a significantly high number of rehearsed, generic research designs. In this examination students were required to design a research proposal to collect qualitative data. Many students accurately selected a qualitative method but frequently failed to contextualise their justification, preferring instead to list the strengths of the method. Whilst the strengths of the method are relevant, they also need to be contextualised. In other words, an explanation of the reasons why the chosen method was particularly useful for the research in question. Whilst research decisions often demonstrated some accurate knowledge, those that were not explained in the context of the design brief had limited value. Many made assumptions in this specific design brief. Many candidates ignored the instruction to select a representative sample of families with young children. Many selected students in the 6th form of their school as the target population reflecting the generic nature of some of the designs. Sampling was yet again the weakest part of most designs and we saw some of the weakest proposed sampling that we have seen for some time.

Whilst centres appear to have established a sound understanding of the task the same cannot be said for the success criteria. Indeed, the quality of responses to this question was very average. Nevertheless, some answers did demonstrate an excellent understanding of both research procedures and the reasons for the decisions made. Some candidates were able to connect their decisions to the task and to wider methodological issues and these candidates were rewarded accordingly. However, a significant number merely described their research design offering very superficial justifications which were focused more on the generic strengths of the method rather than the reasons why this method was the best for the task.

Similarly, the best answers considered most of the stages of research and offered methodologically sound reasons for decisions made whilst weaker answers made either superficial or no reference to some stages of the research design. Some designs were unrealistic and as such demonstrated a lack of engagement with the task. Some candidates wrote a great deal about why they had not chosen to use other methods which was not required.

Many candidates cited problems but did not consider the impact that these might have as the brief had instructed them. This year a significant number of designs cited "being an A Level Sociology student' as the biggest problem! Whilst it is clear that being a student limits the scope of the design there are numerous opportunities to discuss the specific problems of the proposed design and the impact of these problems on the data collected. Candidates should be advised that the best answers are clearly contextualised, demonstrating a sound understanding that decisions about research design should be focused primarily on the research aims as detailed in the design brief.

Section B
2a and 3a
Most candidates were able to offer examples of inequality/class inequality from two areas of life. It was evident that some centres had misunderstood the task as answers lacked actual empirical evidence or cited statistics. Some evidence cited was not appropriate for illustrating inequalities; this was particularly the case where education was used. Candidates seemed confused between difference and inequality. For example, many talked about differences in attainment, but this is only relevant if the reasons for the difference is unequal treatment and this can be supported with evidence of this. So, centres should take care when preparing candidates for this question and beware of examples and evidence that focus on difference rather than inequality. The best answers cited relevant research evidence rather than anecdotal accounts of inequality. Similarly, the best answers referred to a range of evidence and this evidence was explained in the context of how it demonstrated inequality.

Teachers are advised to urge students to read the instructions in the questions very carefully. Where they are asked for two areas of life they need to select two different areas of life. A significant number of candidates relied on examples rather than evidence and this prevented them from achieving band 4 marks. Centres should be advised that candidates are not required to explain why the inequality exists. They are required to explain what the evidence shows and part of their AO2 mark is awarded for the appropriateness of the evidence offered. The best answers demonstrated range and detail whilst weaker answers lacked either detail, range or both.

Q.3 **(a)** The same issues were evident in this question as they were for 2a.

Q.2 **(b)** Unfortunately, the majority of answers were merely descriptive accounts of theoretical perspectives on social class rather than an examination of the value of what they say. A specific problem in this question was that many candidates offered accounts of Marxist theories of inequalities in education/ crime and so on, rather than Marxist explanations of social inequality. Clearly there is a lot of overlap between the two but there is also a lot of irrelevant material such as Marx's theory of social change which was less important in this essay. Where students referred to alternative views of social class inequality they did so in a descriptive way and this meant that evaluation was juxtaposed. Very few candidates utilised evidence or examples as vehicles for evaluation of the theories described and this meant that their AO2 and AO3 marks rarely reached top band. Teachers would be wise to focus on the ability of students to effectively demonstrate all three skills. We have consistently reported that descriptive account of theories will not enable students to access the higher marks for AO2 and AO3.

Q.3 **(b)** This was a popular question with some very competent responses. The best essays examined a range of explanations of ethnic inequalities though not always evaluatively in some cases. Many candidates focused on assimilation theory but often described it instead of evaluating it. Where essays examined Marxist ideas they rarely referred to key concepts such as racialised class fraction. Surprisingly, not all answers examined racism as a possible explanation. The problems identified in 2b were also evident in 3b; evaluative debate utilising evidence as a platform for commentary.

Summary of key points

- Contextualise answers to 1a questions.
- Contextualise justification of the research design in 1b.
- Identify problems and impact in 1b.
- Select appropriate evidence in 2a/3a.
- Engage in a debate in 2b/3b.