AQA

General Certificate of Education

Sociology 1191

SCLY1   **Culture and Identity;**

Families and Households;

Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

Report on the Examination

2011 examination – January series

SCLY1

General

There were very few rubric errors and generally candidates seem to be very familiar with the demands of the exam. Most candidates seemed able to manage their time appropriately and leave enough time for the final essay. However there is a tendency for candidates to ignore the actual wording of the question. Many of these candidates demonstrate a range of knowledge and understanding of sociology, but fail to interpret the question appropriately and apply their knowledge to the question set (for example Question 10). There was also a significant minority who referred to answers contained in the Item when explicitly barred from doing so in the question (for example Question 02 and Question 07).

Section A – Culture and Identity

Question 01

The majority of candidates were able to give a satisfactory explanation or definition such as: shared culture/identity based on eg religion, nationality, language, geography, history. Language and regional identity were the most popular examples given by many candidates to illustrate their point. Some candidates received partial credit for examples of the latter without a secure general definition.

Question 02

Many candidates were able to identify ways in which an individual's social experience may be affected by age, such as ageism (against young and/or old), legal prohibitions (on drinking, driving etc) and access to employment. A significant number were unable to steer clear of various 'leisure activities' though this was in the Item and explicitly precluded in the question. A minority of candidates wrote very long answers with poorly focused points.

Question 03

The majority of candidates were successful at suggesting characteristics of the globalisation of culture with specific examples of the impact on media, food, dress etc. This was rewarded alongside more theoretical statements regarding Americanisation and/or McDonaldisation. Answers that suggested cultural imperialism or the rise of hybrid cultures were equally acceptable. Some candidates failed to secure two marks by giving one-word responses (eg 'food') with no attempt to link to globalisation of culture, while others referred to processes such as media saturation that were not explicitly linked to globalisation.

Question 04

Many candidates produced a reasonably successful answer to this question. Most were able to identify the distinction between primary and secondary socialisation and to suggest how agencies of socialisation such as the family and education may contribute to the process. The weakest answers did so in a highly commonsensical way, or drifted away from the process of socialisation to provide an all-encompassing account of an agency of socialisation. More capable candidates were able to develop their discussion via conceptual and theoretical accounts. There were some very successful examples both of agencies of socialisation and of perspectives-driven responses. Theory was often presented accurately but in a juxtaposed format. The best responses were able to provide intelligent debate of either conflict or consensus approaches to socialisation or of interactionist/postmodernist critiques of deterministic accounts.

Question 05

The quality of responses to this question was variable and often the result of limited interpretation rather than poor knowledge. Many candidates showed a good understanding of social class, but tended to discuss issues such as the class structure and life chances with little regard for identity. Better responses were able to focus on aspects of the culture of different classes and how this might relate to identity through ideas such as social closure and the old boys' network in relation to the upper classes or collectivism as a feature of working class culture and identity. These responses also had a clear sense of the changing significance of class and were able to develop postmodernist views beyond the Item. Some candidates successfully suggested the growing relevance of other social divisions to identity. There was however, a significant minority of candidates who struggled to get beyond the idea that identity could be shaped by shopping and gave quite lengthy answers with limited sociological understanding.

Section B – Families and Households

Question 06

Most candidates had some notion of migration and a large number recognised that net migration refers to the relationship between inward and outward migration. Many candidates viewed migration solely in terms of immigration and failed to score. Some had little understanding of the concept and preferred to offer reasons for migration.

Question 07

Many candidates achieved full marks for recognising appropriate reasons for migration to the UK. These were a combination of 'pull factors' (such as the availability of welfare services and access to education) along with 'push factors' such as the escape from war or oppression for a range of political reasons. A significant minority ignored the instruction in the question and cited reasons connected with the search for employment. Vague responses along the lines of 'a better life' needed to be made more explicit to gain full marks.

Question 08

A large number of candidates were able to identify two ways in which greater ethnic diversity has contributed to family diversity (most often extended families and lone parent families) but struggled to find a third. More successful candidates were able to identify relevant ways such as attitudes to marriage, gender roles and relationships and multi-racial families. Some less successful candidates wrote long answers about multicultural society without linking this to family diversity. Others listed types of family diversity without linking these to ethnicity.

Question 09

Most candidates were able to recognise that marriage had become less popular, partially at the expense of cohabitation, and to offer a sound range of reasons for this, for example secularisation, the changing role of women, the fear of divorce, higher expectations of marriage and the cost of a 'typical' marriage. The best answers clearly identified the changing patterns and then discussed reasons. Less successful answers launched into reasons without stating the patterns that the discussion related to. The extent to which answers were successful also depended on the level of analysis offered and the ability to use conceptual and theoretical knowledge to explain or evaluate the changes identified. This was sometimes achieved successfully via discussion of the neo-conventional family, the impact of postmodernity or feminism on attitudes to marriage and the attractiveness of alternatives. However, these accounts sometimes drifted into a discussion of the merits of marriage and cohabitation rather than sticking to the discussion of reasons for the changes in patterns. Similarly, stronger candidates often used knowledge of divorce to link to cohabitation, reluctance to marry and re-marriage, while others covered this issue at the expense of an explicit focus on the question.

Question 10

Many candidates had a range of appropriate sociological knowledge on the emergence and changing nature of childhood. However, the extent to which this was marshalled to child-centredness and the modern family was extremely variable. Skilful answers were able to focus specifically on parenting via ideas such as age patriarchy and the decline in infant mortality, and to draw material on changes in education, employment law, divorce and the media round to issues relevant to the family (eg children as an economic burden, parents relying on media as a 'babysitter'). Others simply outlined material (especially Aries and Postman) with no explicit focus on the question. Many candidates were able to construct a debate about child-centredness, with the work of Pugh, Palmer and Gittins all used to challenge the child-centred thesis, or to suggest negative consequences of it. Weak answers tended to provide unsophisticated accounts of child abuse as the main evaluative point, with lengthy narratives of the story of Baby P with little sociological knowledge. Many knowledgeable and able candidates focused on society rather than the family and therefore did not score as well as they might have done with a better focus on the specifics of the question. It is clear that some candidates need practice on this aspect of writing exam answers in order to do themselves justice in their response to the questions that are set.

Section C – Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

Question 11

Most candidates were clearly familiar with the term. They had a clear understanding of social exclusion, as distinct from merely financial poverty, and often used examples such as exclusion from leisure activities to explain this.

Question 12

Most candidates were able to accurately identify two characteristics of the culture of poverty. The most common responses were fatalism and marginalisation.

Question 13

Candidates were generally able to recognise a range of reasons why people with disabilities may be more likely than other social groups to experience poverty. Popular responses included direct discrimination, a lack of access to certain types of work and the cost of medical/social care.

Question 14

Candidates appeared to struggle with this question and, while many were able to explain the functions of inequality (often via role allocation), fewer were able to home in specifically on poverty. Most candidates were able to offer a functionalist account of social inequality juxtaposed with other theories (Marxist, New Right) of the causes of poverty but with limited explicit focus on the ways in which poverty may be functional for society. However, there were some very good answers that were able to analyse the functions of poverty for society using functionalist, Marxist and feminist perspectives to explore the arguments.

Question 15

The majority of candidates were able to explain the differences between absolute and relative poverty and the ways in which these had been defined. There was sometimes confusion, however, in understanding the ways in which studies had been carried out. A number of candidates drifted into other issues such as the causes of poverty. The measurement of social exclusion, as referred to in the Item, was not often picked up and used effectively. Evaluation was usually limited to juxtaposition of several studies. Good answers were able to identify the different approaches to measuring poverty (for example, Rowntree, Townsend, Mack and Lansley), and were able to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results statistics** page of the AQA Website.