



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Sociology

SCLY3

(Specification 2191)

**Unit 3: Beliefs in Society;
Global Development;
Mass media;
Power and Politics**

Report on the Examination

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SCLY3

Section A – Beliefs in Society

Question 01

Students mostly did well on this question. The most often cited reasons were believing but not belonging, belonging but not believing, the privatisation of religion and various reasons linked to research methods on belief. Some students failed to gain marks when the reasons they gave were too similar and showed a high degree of overlap. Others failed to score marks when they simply expanded their reasons rather than explaining them.

Question 02

Better answers to this question showed knowledge and understanding of a range of feminist research. Students used studies by Holm, El Saadawi, Woodhead, Armstrong and Watson. Knowledge was also shown of a range of contemporary religions and their practices regarding women. What differentiated the better answers from less successful efforts was the ability to apply studies and theories to the question set, rather than writing in general terms about women and religion.

Question 03

The majority of students interpreted this question as focusing simply on the influence of religion. Some wrote just on secularisation, exploring the evidence for and against. It was disappointing that few addressed issues to do with ideologies and even fewer considered or compared the relative influence of these in a global context. Thus, when Marxism was mentioned, it was usually in the context of the Marxist view of religion and religious ideologies. Rarely did anyone consider the influence of Marxism itself or compare it with the influence of religion. The same was true of other ideologies, such as feminism, capitalism and postmodernism.

When students did broaden the debate it was usually by reference to the influence of science. However, this tended to recount the views of Weber on rationality or Popper on science rather than addressing the issue of science's influence today.

Question 04

It was perhaps surprising that, given the quite open nature of this question, it was attempted only by a minority of the students answering questions in Section A. Those who did offer a response usually referred to typologies, such as that of Wallis, or gave lengthy descriptive accounts of different sects. This led some students into over-lengthy accounts of mass suicides and the role of Jim Jones.

Some students missed opportunities to score marks as they conflated sects and cults, or did not differentiate between sects, cults and New Age movements.

Section B – Global Development

Question 05

There were many good answers to this question. The activities most often cited were raising standards of living, providing employment, improving training and skills, and increasing investment. A few students pointed out that not all contributions are necessarily positive.

Question 06

There were some very good answers here, covering two or more theoretical perspectives. It was pleasing to see that there was slightly less evidence of a stereotyped ‘modernisation versus dependency’ structure to the answers than with similar questions on previous papers. Many cited contemporary examples (some clearly from news stories covered during the student’s course rather than taken from textbooks). Better answers here were distinguished by their specificity, while less successful answers often left the notion of ‘aid’ unpacked and without examples. Similarly, weaker answers tended to list types of aid and to concentrate on ways in which aid was helpful (eg emergency aid) rather than harmful.

Question 07

Most students compared the two theories, giving the commonly understood criticisms made of each but without much success in linking this discussion to a changing world. Students were usually familiar with both the theories named in the question and were able to describe their main characteristics, but this was often done in a ‘timeless’ fashion. There were few references to globalisation or its implications for theories. Some linked the two theories to ‘today’ by referring to their shared neglect of environmental issues. Better responses evaluated both theories, positively and negatively, for their contributions to explaining the world today, pointing out clearly where the theories could apply and using examples. The best answers applied knowledge of the theories to topics and issues in global development today, such as growing concern with gender equality, the environmental impacts of development, and the rise of the ‘BRIC’ nations.

Question 08

Most answers reflected a view of development that was rather full of doom and gloom. Most students provided a range of environmental problems and linked these to development. This approach proved quite successful. As always, specificity was the key to better answers. Some students compared the relative contribution to environmental problems of ‘development’ and ‘western consumerism’. Sadly, there was almost no recognition of any attempts at sustainable development.

Section C – Mass Media

Question 09

Most students responded to the issue of change from the perspective of the consumer. Thus, the ways identified tended to focus on changes in communication, the marketing of goods, global branding, access to information, social networking and the 24-hour news agenda. A minority included organisational changes, such as the development of global media corporations and issues concerning the regulation and control of the media. The ongoing Leveson Inquiry provided useful examples for some students.

Question 10

Many students saw this as an opportunity to revisit the study by Cohen on folk devils and moral panics. Some ventured little further. Students with wider knowledge considered the whole issue of stereotyping and labelling by the media and why the young, in particular, should be seen as a problem or threat to society. Many provided evidence to balance the debate, showing how many of the good actions by young people, for example, in the performing arts or in caring roles, are reported through various media outlets.

Question 11

It was clear that many students were not prepared for this topic, but had prepared extensive responses to questions on Marxist or pluralist views on the media. Thus, many simply dispensed with their material on postmodernist views in a few lines or a paragraph and then moved on to a lengthy answer comparing the other perspectives. Such approaches clearly limited the marks they could gain as a high proportion of the answer did not address the question set.

Some students had a more extensive knowledge of postmodernist views and, in particular, they also had an understanding of how such views might affect our ideas on the mass media. In such answers, the work of Lyotard, Strinati, Baudrillard, Curran and Seaton, Cornford and Robbins, and Jenkins, featured prominently.

Question 12

There were many excellent responses to this question. Moderate answers came from those who saw this mainly as a question about news values, which were then listed and described at great length. Better answers came from those who looked at a wider range of factors involved in news production and presentation, including the role of news diaries, institutional factors, cultural factors, and logistical issues, such as the time or space available to present stories. Concepts such as agenda setting and gate-keeping featured in many of these answers. Such answers also made good use of theory, usually contrasting Marxist, neo-Marxist and pluralist views.

Section D – Power and Politics

Question 13

Students experienced mixed fortunes when answering this question. Some students had particular difficulty in seeking to provide answers that were applicable to ‘the past 30 years or so’. Some gave answers that were not 30 years sensitive, eg “newspapers influence voting”. However, some students were able to develop a good answer from a similar knowledge base, eg “growing influence”, being provided with a very good explanation of recent developments of the media. Some answers took a theoretical stance that was often at a tangent to the question. Some students failed to achieve full marks because they merely stated a way in which the media had changed without offering an explanation.

Question 14

Many students saw this as an opportunity to write all they knew about theories of power or elites. While much of this material could have been made relevant, it was a pity to see so many students largely ignore the question set. Those who did focus more centrally on the question took a brief look at the major theories but also considered such issues as the growth of transnational corporations, global pressure groups and new social movements, the power of the Internet as a means of information transmission in relation to national borders, the prestige of politicians in general, and the growth of supra-national organisations such as the European Union. These issues were then assessed in terms of their influence on the power of elected politicians.

Of those answers that had material referring to the role of politicians and power, the better answers had a clear focus on ‘today’.

Question 15

Some students took a ‘similarities versus differences’ approach that sometimes produced a good answer. However, for many this approach was list-like and therefore could not achieve high AO2 marks. Some answers focused on theoretical approaches or typologies, offering very little in the way of examples. Better answers showed an understanding of the roles of the two types of organisation and also considered other factors such as membership, structure, global presence and political tactics and strategies.

Question 16

Some answers were very good in detailing a number of relevant global issues, such as human rights, environmental concerns, terrorism, global warming, development and trade, and in analysing their significance for the debate. Some answers took an historical view with limited focus on ‘today’. Other answers simply listed examples of global political bodies, eg Greenpeace, the EU, with very little focus on the set question.

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