

CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS
GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level and GCE Advanced Level

MARK SCHEME for the May/June 2014 series

9699 SOCIOLOGY

9699/23

Paper 2 (Theory and Methods), maximum raw mark 50

This mark scheme is published as an aid to teachers and candidates, to indicate the requirements of the examination. It shows the basis on which Examiners were instructed to award marks. It does not indicate the details of the discussions that took place at an Examiners' meeting before marking began, which would have considered the acceptability of alternative answers.

Mark schemes should be read in conjunction with the question paper and the Principal Examiner Report for Teachers.

Cambridge will not enter into discussions about these mark schemes.

Cambridge is publishing the mark schemes for the May/June 2014 series for most IGCSE, GCE Advanced Level and Advanced Subsidiary Level components and some Ordinary Level components.

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Section A

- 1 Sociologists carry out research in order to collect data in a systematic and organised way. In doing so, they will opt to collect data that is quantitative or qualitative. However, it is increasingly common for researchers to adopt an approach that involves combining different types of method which produces both types of data. Whatever approach is taken, the data collected provides the sociologist with evidence to help describe or explain the social world.

However, some sociologists believe that research should also contribute to making society a better place. In other words, they think that sociological research should seek to solve some of society's social problems and to therefore influence *social policy*. On the other hand, there are many other sociologists who reject this approach, arguing that all sociological enquiries should be devoted to explaining the social world rather than seeking to change it.

(a) What is meant by the term *social policy*? [2]

Social policy refers to the actions taken by a government which are designed to maintain and improve the welfare of its citizens. Its purpose is to deal with and resolve potential and actual social problems. This includes areas such as housing, education, crime, health etc. Two marks for a clear, accurate definition. 1 mark for a partial definition, such as 'attempts to make society a better place'.

(b) Describe two reasons why a researcher might use more than one type of method. [4]

- The combined use of different research techniques [mixed methods] is used to complement and verify each method, in order to achieve robust research results.
- They are also used to generate a more vivid and complete picture of whatever is being studied.
- Those who adopt this approach – in practice, most researchers – may do so because they do not feel tied to the traditional distinction between qualitative and quantitative approaches.
- Their decisions may also be driven by practicalities, which is a further point of development. 1 mark for the reason plus 1 mark for development (2 × 2 marks).

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(c) Explain the difference between a social problem and a sociological problem. [8]

Social problems are aspects of a society or social behaviour that have negative consequences for the individuals and groups concerned, as well as for the society as a whole. Negative consequences may include poverty, crime and unemployment, and are likely to be linked to social policy measures. While sociologists are invariably interested in social problems, and some may view their role as providing solutions to these problems, the primary sociological interest is in seeking to provide an explanation for them. They are interested in what is considered a problem, why this is the case, why some are considered to be problems and not others etc.

0–4 Answers at this level are likely to be based on a few mostly common sense observations that fail to distinguish between the two concepts, probably focusing on the social problem element and identifying some examples.

5–8 Answers at this level will demonstrate a good understanding of the question, with links to relevant sociological material and ideas. In this band, the distinction will be clear. At the top end of the band the explanation will be detailed and well focussed on the importance of making such a distinction so as to clearly identify the proper domain of sociological enquiry.

NB This question asks candidates to ‘explain’, therefore there is no requirement for assessment.

(d) Assess the view that the main role of sociological research should be to help create a better society. [11]

0–4 Any relevant points at this level will be vague and poorly supported by references to evidence and arguments. A legitimate viewpoint may be asserted, but the answer will be weak in terms of its development and structure. Some awareness that there are different views about the purpose of sociological research may be apparent in a very basic way, towards the top end of the band.

5–8 Answers will demonstrate an awareness of the arguments and perspectives that support the idea that sociological research should aim to bring about a better society. Higher in the band this may be contrasted with relevant alternative views, particularly those that argue for a value-neutral sociology. However, the assessment will remain weak at this level.

9–11 The assessment will be more developed, perhaps through references to the practical and theoretical problems involved in using sociological research as a basis for social engineering. Higher in the band, the assessment will be characterised by some sophistication; for example, candidates may question whose interests sociological research serves and who may benefit from supposed improvements in society; and which values underpin the idea of social engineering and what type of society it may give rise to.

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2 'Only the post-modernist perspective can explain the factors influencing social identity today.' Explain and assess this claim. [25]

0–6 A few vague reflections on the nature of culture and social identity might be worth 3 or 4 marks. Some simple points about post-modernist theory, perhaps contrasting post-modernism with modernism in a basic way, but poorly linked to the question, would be placed in the top of the band.

7–12 Answers that merit being placed in the lower end of the band may lack a reference to post-modernist theory and may focus on discussing the strengths or limitations of other perspectives on culture and identity. Higher in the band, some knowledge of post-modernist theory must be demonstrated and applied to the question appropriately. For example, the notion that social actors are now able to exercise a high degree of choice about their identity and of the social groups they belong to; in addition, responses may refer to the instability and changeability attached to post-modern identity. However, the coverage of relevant post-modernist ideas is likely to be partial and may include some inaccuracies in the points made. There may be little or no assessment of the effectiveness of post-modernist theories at this level.

13–18 Lower in the band, the account of post-modernist theories may still lack breadth of coverage, though the material used will be described with greater accuracy. Higher in the band, a wider range of post-modernist concepts and themes will be explored and there will also be some analysis of how effective post-modernism is to the understanding of culture and identity formation. However, the analysis may lack depth at this level [e.g. post-modernism is a more 'up to date' theory than other ones] and is likely to rely mainly on juxtaposition of post-modernist ideas with other sociological perspectives. There is no requirement for assessment at this level.

19–25 Answers at this level must achieve **three** things:

First, there will be good sociological knowledge and understanding.

Second, the material used will be interpreted accurately and applied effectively to answering the question.

Third, there must also be some evidence of assessment.

A good account of the post-modernist understanding of culture and identity will be offered at this level. This may include references to different strands of post-modernist thought and to different thinkers within that perspective. Concepts such as consumer culture and hyper-reality may feature in good responses. There will also be a sustained and well-informed assessment of the extent to which post-modernist ideas help provide a valid understanding of contemporary culture and identity. Lower in the band, the assessment may still rely mainly on juxtaposition of post-modernist ideas with contributions from other sociological perspectives. Higher in the band, the assessment must include some explicit evaluation of the strengths and/or limitations of post-modernism which is directly related to the question.

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3 Explain and assess the value of using semi-structured interviews in sociological research.

0–6 Answers at this level may be characterised by a few elementary observations about interviews in general. The mention of a couple of distinguishing features of semi-structured interviews may justify a mark at the top of the band.

7–12 Lower in the band, some relevant features will be described, though the account may fail to clearly differentiate between semi-structured interviews and other types of interviews. At the top end of the band, reference will be made to the type of data produced by semi-structured interviews as well as some appreciation that this is related to key methodological concepts such as validity and reliability, and possibly to representativeness. Practical consideration may also feature, perhaps in relation to the sample and its make-up, and the type of information required by the researcher.

13–18 Answers will provide an accurate and balanced account of the use of semi-structured interviews, in all probability by contrasting them with other types of interviews. At the lower end of the band, this will be descriptive and will be mainly achieved by juxtaposition. Theoretical and practical points will be considered, though not necessarily with equal emphasis. Higher in the band, there will also be a basic attempt to assess the usefulness of semi-structured interviews and its ‘middle’ position will be explored. Good responses will recognise that whilst these interviews yield both quantitative and qualitative data, they are primarily classified as a qualitative method. Good responses should explore the flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews, whilst linking this to the collection of different data sets. Reward references to relevant studies which illustrate this, though it would be possible to answer the question fully without referring to studies. The idea of ‘fit for purpose’ may be explored. There is no requirement for assessment at this level.

19–25 Answers at this level must achieve **three** things:

First, there will be good sociological knowledge and understanding.

Second, the material used will be interpreted accurately and applied effectively to answering the question.

Third, there must also be some evidence of assessment.

At this level answers will provide an accurate, detailed and balanced account of the theoretical and practical context of the use of this type of interview. Reference to studies may feature in good responses but are not essential to be placed in the highest band. The assessment will be explicit and, at the top of the band, will provide coherent and incisive conclusions about the relative merits of semi-structured interviews, perhaps showing that this reveals that the rather crude division that exists between qualitative and quantitative approaches is less apparent in actual research than it is ‘in theory’. A distinguishing feature of answers at this level may also be the ability to identify appropriate links to the theoretical perspectives that endorse the use of different methodologies, namely, interpretivism and positivism.