

OCR Report to Centres

January 2013

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

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Overview

H181

On both of the AS examinations, candidates are generally performing well, demonstrating understanding of the assessment objectives and question demands. The AS sociology specification has been assessed a number of times now and it is clear that centres are becoming increasingly familiar with the structure and assessment requirements of each unit. There are very few rubric errors made by candidates, which suggests that centres and teachers are preparing students effectively for the specific requirements of the examination papers.

Overall there continues to be a wide variation in the performance of candidates; those who attained high marks were able to demonstrate that they understood, interpreted and evaluated sociological evidence with clarity and accuracy, using a range of sociological knowledge in the form of theories, studies, concepts and contemporary examples. On the other hand, low achieving candidates had a very basic understanding of sociological evidence, tending to rely instead on anecdotal and asociological material.

The term 'sociological evidence' refers to concepts, studies, data, theories, and contemporary examples and candidates are encouraged to use a range of these in order to demonstrate they have a wide-ranging knowledge and understanding. However, it should be noted that candidates who rely only on contemporary examples would not score highly because, on their own, contemporary examples are not good sociology. The A grade and the E grade are set at very similar levels for both the AS units, demonstrating that candidates respond to both units in a similar way. The detailed reports included in this document suggest that, across both examination papers, candidates seem to struggle most with the skill of interpretation and application. This skill is often about responding to the specific question or context, and given that candidates cannot prepare themselves for the exact nature of the questions, this is a skill area that is challenging.

H581

The comments from the principal examiners on the two A2 units show that candidates are becoming increasingly familiar with the structure of these examinations. The vast majority of candidates answered all questions, or all question parts and the impression was that they were generally well prepared for these examinations.

As has been the case with other January sessions, G674 had a very small entry as the vast majority of centres enter candidates for this unit at the end of a two-year course in June. The A2 examination papers are very different to each other: G673 requires two unstructured essay questions on one or more substantive topic areas; G674 is a structured examination paper, in which a piece of source material and questions combine sociological research methods with social inequality and difference. They are, however, weighted equally at 50 per cent each of the A2 course.

There follows a report on each of the units from this session, with some suggested teaching tips for teachers, focusing particularly on the skills needed to achieve success in this specification. Although this is the last January session, teachers are encouraged to read the relevant sections and to keep an eye on the OCR website for details of on-line INSET provision as feedback and preparation for future summer examinations.

G671 Exploring Socialisation, Culture and Identity

General Comments:

This session, once again, saw a wide range of candidate performance, and overall, candidates slightly improved upon their performance compared to last year. As centres become increasingly familiar with the structure of this examination paper, and particularly the pre-release material, there is some evidence that candidates are more aware of the assessment requirements of each question. Increasing numbers of candidates are responding accurately to the question stem instructions. For example, question 2 will always ask for "two ways/ types/ features" and many candidates plan their answer into two distinct paragraphs, citing "the first way..." followed by "a second way...".

There were very few rubric errors and the vast majority of candidates attempted to answer all four questions, which indicates that the questions were clear and accessible to all. The majority of candidates allocated their time appropriately, recognising, for example that since question 4 has half the marks for the exam paper, they should be spending half the time answering this question. There is some evidence that candidates performed better on questions 1 and 4 compared to previous sessions. It was, however, noticeable that a large number of candidates struggled to answer questions 2 and 3 in a sociological way and lacked knowledge and understanding of sociological evidence about age identities. There is a more detailed commentary on this question in the section below.

It may be useful to clarify the role and purpose of the pre-release material. The pre-release material is specifically related to question 4 on the examination paper as this question contains the instruction "using the pre-release material...". The focus of question 4 is always on sociological methods and the research process and the aim of this question is to enable candidates to discuss methodological issues in the context of a piece of contemporary research focused on culture and/or identity and/or socialisation (the pre-release material).

The other three questions on the examination paper aim to test candidates on the specification content from this unit, which is outlined clearly and explicitly laid out as seven key issues in the specification content. That is not to say, however, that the pre-release material can *only* be used for question 4. As the instructions on the front of the examination paper state: "*You may interpret and apply the pre-release material as well as your own sociological knowledge for any question, wherever it is relevant and appropriate*". This is because the pre-release material is based around research into culture, socialisation and identity which means that any other questions 1-3 asking candidates to write about these areas may wish to draw upon the pre-release as a piece of sociological evidence.

It may happen, as it did this session, that the pre-release material could be referred to in every question: For question 1, candidates could make references to the status differences between working and retired people or between older and younger; question 2, how the workplace can exert social control; and question 3 - work and retirement as indicators of age identity. Of course, candidates who only rely on the pre-release material as their only source of evidence are not going to score highly as they will fail to display the 'wide range' of knowledge and understanding that is required for the top band. In other sessions, there may not be so many links to the pre-release material in questions 1, 2 or 3 and candidates will need to be able to draw on a range of sociological evidence.

Teachers' tip:

Centres are recommended to keep copies of previous pre-release studies, not just to use as mock examination practice, but also as a bank of resources to add to the range of evidence candidates could draw upon.

With every question, in order to achieve marks in the highest mark band, candidates need to include a range of sociological evidence and to discuss these with some depth. A large number of responses, particularly for questions 2 and 3 failed to include the required range and depth of sociological evidence. 'Evidence' can include studies, theories, concepts and contemporary examples, although it should be noted that responses that rely heavily on contemporary examples will not score very highly as, on their own, contemporary examples are not good sociology.

It is also worth noting that there is a difference between contemporary examples and anecdote. Contemporary examples mean events in society that can inform sociology but may not have been formally researched or studied; or events that are happening as sociologists are carrying out their research. For example, some candidates used the examples of personalities/celebrities who have arguably been the victim of ageism in the BBC.

Anecdotal evidence, on the other hand, is bordering on 'common sense' knowledge and this is not rewarded in the examination; for example, by claiming that 'detentions in school are not an effective form of social control in my experience'. Responses that were wide-ranging in their use of sociological studies in questions 2 and 3 tended to score highly.

There is some evidence that question 4 responses have improved in quality since the start of this new unit. However, some candidates did experience timing issues; most commonly by spending too much time on question 1, which should be allocated approximately five minutes, or by spending too long on question 4 at the expense of the other three questions. Some candidates spent far too long on question 2, sometimes writing up to two sides for a question that should be answered in approximately 15 minutes. There is some evidence that where candidates choose to answer question 4 first, they often spend too long on this and then run out of time for questions 1, 2 or 3.

Candidates who had been prepared well, even those who were clearly of weaker ability, managed to pick up marks on all questions, by knowing the assessment requirements and using sociological evidence appropriately. However, some centres did not seem to have adequately prepared their candidates either by having very little understanding of the role of the pre-release material, for example, by copying out large chunks of the findings; or armed with very little sociological knowledge for questions 1, 2 and 3.

On the whole there was a clear difference between the high and low achieving candidates. At the top end, there was a range of sociological evidence contained in answers to all of the questions. Such responses included relevant and detailed explanations including sociological studies, concepts and theories where appropriate. The lower achieving candidates were often unable to provide sociological knowledge and understanding and their answers became very anecdotal and common sense like. Candidates must be encouraged to back up their answers with sociological evidence; be it concepts, studies, relevant contemporary examples or theory. For example, in answers to question 2, candidates who discussed ways of social control in relation to studies, concepts and theories scored more highly than those who wrote about, for example, school detentions and parents telling-off their children.

In terms of assessment objectives, knowledge and understanding (AO1) remains the strongest area; good candidates were able to offer a whole range of sociological knowledge, mainly in the form of concepts and studies, but sometimes making relevant use of contemporary examples and theory. Interpretation and analysis (AO2a) seemed to be the most difficult skill area for

candidates; whilst many have been trained to evaluate evidence and arguments, they are less successful at interpreting knowledge and applying it to the specific question or context. For example, in question 3, candidates were able to offer good explanations of age identity and the cultural characteristics of different age groups, but they failed to focus explicitly on the process of socialisation into age identities, which was the focus of the question. It is also worth pointing out that a significant number of candidates are not offering any evaluation for question 3, which is worth 4 marks and candidates must be reminded that there is also an evaluative element to this question.

Teaching tip: Devise a mark sheet (or request one from a fellow sociology teacher on the e-community), based on the published mark schemes that you can attach to your candidates work so that they are aware of being marked according to the three separate assessment objectives.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1

In general this question was answered very well and the vast majority of candidates understood the core meaning of the concept of 'status' by relating it to position in society/hierarchy/how highly regarded people are. Some candidates confused the concept of 'status' with 'social class' or 'identity' by, for example, stating that status is about how you are seen in society. This type of answer was awarded marks for being a 'partial answer' as it didn't focus enough on the idea of hierarchy and position.

There were many candidates who achieved full marks for this question and most of these started by offering a clear one-sentence definition (2 marks), followed by some development of this by, for example, saying that there are different types of status, ascribed and achieved; or by saying that status can be applied to occupation, family, ethnicity, gender, age etc or by explaining that one person can have a high and low status at the same time (eg BNP supporter).

Some candidates didn't offer enough further development of the definition to get the full four marks. Four out of the eight marks are available for giving examples and most examples centred around ascribed and achieved status - most commonly cited examples were Prince William and David Beckham or Alan Sugar. Those who achieved the full four marks for examples were able to explain fully, rather than just stating that we value life, or we value material possessions. Some candidates confused status with role in their examples by, for example, stating mother, daughter, son as a status. This only worked if the role was specifically linked to status; for example, 'in many societies the role of son confers higher status than the role of daughter'.

There were also some candidates who spent too long on this question and on writing a one whole page answer. This obviously has implications for later questions and candidates should be reminded that they should spend approximately 5 minutes only on this question.

Teaching tip: Question 1 is always a concept question taken from the specification content. Candidates will benefit from having detailed definitions and examples for each one. Candidates should be encouraged to keep a glossary with all of these key terms.

Question 2

In order to access high marks on this question candidates needed to increase the level of depth included in their answers. Commonly, responses cited two ways in which individuals experience social control and most chose either an agency of socialisation or stated formal and informal. However, most responses then offered a brief explanation with some common-sense examples and therefore could not achieve more than level 2. Those that purely relied on contemporary

examples tended not to be able to demonstrate enough breadth or depth of knowledge to reach the higher mark bands.

Weaker responses were confused and/or anecdotal, showing no real understanding of different experiences of social control and instead tried to turn it into a question on socialisation. The best responses used sociological concepts and/or studies, such as McRobbie (social control of girls) and Burdsey (informal social control within the peer group) and used concepts such as negative and positive sanctions.

Question 3

The best answers contained a wide range of evidence and a strong focus on how the agents of socialisation create age identity; for example, discussing Postman's views of how the media has changed childhood; or Thornton's study on how the media creates youth deviance.

There were, however, a number of issues with this question. In many responses, there was a heavy focus on general topic of age, which was not applied to the specific question about socialisation into age identities. A large number of candidates spent a lot of time explaining the characteristics of youth, middle and old age, but did not focus enough on socialisation. A large number of responses only answered through contemporary examples and this, alone, cannot reach beyond level 2 of the mark scheme.

Some of the weaker answers purely listed examples of different age categories and how that was reflecting in television shows or in the family. When evidence was used, there was distinct under-development and application to the specific question. In a number of instances candidates tried to shift the focus away from age to gender. For a number of candidates they applied these well to the media highlighting how role models affect young girls; citing McRobbie's notion of 'slimblondness', for example. However, a larger number were too heavily focused on gender at the expense of age. Such responses were unable to reach beyond level 2 for AO1 and AO2a.

One feature of stronger responses was the presence of explicit evaluation of the question. The most common approach was to note that age might be biological/chronological rather than socialised. However, candidates need to be reminded that their evaluation needs to contain sociological evidence; it is not enough to simply state that agencies of socialisation are important. Where evaluation was weaker, candidates only evaluated in an implicit and assertive way by, for example, just stating the family has a 'very important' role in socialising people into age identities.

Some candidates spend too much time evaluating the view in the question whilst there are also a significant number of candidates who don't offer evaluation points at all and therefore lose four potential marks. Candidates need to be reminded that this question will always start with the instruction to "*explain and briefly evaluate*".

Question 4

A wide range of responses was seen for this question. The vast majority of candidates knew how to define an unstructured interview, linking it with interpretivism and qualitative data. Most candidates were able to discuss issues surrounding the wider research process, such as sampling, access and ethics. A key differentiator in marking this question was candidates' use of the key concepts as highlighted in the specification - validity, reliability, representativeness and generalisability. Some weaker responses did not explicitly use these concepts and therefore achieved marks at the bottom of level 2. Others did attempt to use the concepts but were very confused, partial or undeveloped.

To reach level 3 of the mark scheme, and beyond, for both AO1 and AO2b, responses needed to address the key concepts in an accurate and wide-ranging way. Even where candidates correctly discussed the key concepts, they were often not developed enough in explanation to reach level 4.

Another feature of weaker responses was in candidates understanding of methodological pluralism or triangulation. It was often the case that candidates included a generic discussion of these terms but they didn't always understand how to apply it to this context and make it relevant.

The high achieving responses tended to systematically explain the method, offering a range of strengths and weaknesses and including key concepts. Another characteristic of strong responses was the discussion of aspects of the wider research process; for example, sampling, access, ethics and the impact of these.

Many candidates made good use of theory in their responses, linking Jones's research design to the interpretivist tradition and offering a positivist critique. Strong responses recognised the qualitative nature of the findings and used these to illustrate strengths/weaknesses of the method. Such responses tended to be conceptually strong, referring to issues surrounding social desirability, rapport, interviewer effects, Verstehen. Teachers need to ensure that they spend some time teaching the content of the pre-release material in preparation for the exam.

One significant problem was the number of candidates who wasted time copying out the pre-release material and described the findings of the study. Once again, candidates should be reminded that this is stimulus material, not source material. The philosophy behind the pre-release material is to give candidates the opportunity to look at some real research in depth but the exam question will always require them to go wider than this; to address research issues, methods, process and concepts and using the pre-release as an illustrative example.

It must also be noted that twelve marks are awarded for AO2a and in this question it is about how well the candidate contextualises their responses. The majority of candidates offered generalised answers or just threw in the words 'retirees' or 'identity' or had very inaccurate ideas about early retirees, confusing them with the very elderly. To score highly in this skill area, candidates need to be asking themselves 'What is the problem/advantage of using this method for studying *this* particular group (voluntary early retirees) on *this* particular topic (retirement and age identity)'. Candidates could be encouraged to highlight the actual question on the question paper, particularly where it states 'to research...'

Stronger responses in this area offered some very thoughtful comments about how the issue of identity may need more qualitative methods as it is a complex topic area; or how asking retired senior managers to talk at length in an interview would probably work, given that they may have been used to giving seminars/presentations as part of their working lives. Other good contextual references discussed the personal nature of the research, the status of older people and the difficulty of accessing an appropriate sample.

Candidates who did score highly on this skill engaged much more fully with the context, often using the sampling procedure as an opportunity to explore the possible differences in the attitudes of different types of retired people.

The findings were included in the pre-release material to enable candidates to gain an understanding of the value of this research and to discuss the idea of the method being fit for purpose. There were some strong responses that linked the findings into the research methodology; for example by recognising the limitations of unstructured, conversational interviews in terms of researcher imposition.

Some centres had prepared candidates to make reference to other research that had either used a similar methodology, or was focused on a similar topic. This was rewarded where references were being used to support or criticise a methodological issue but centres need to advise candidates not to spend time describing the findings of other studies as this is a question about methods.

G672 Topics in Socialisation, Culture and Identity

General Comments

An overwhelming majority of candidates chose to answer both family questions and only a small number of candidates chose questions from more than one option. Generally candidates used their time appropriately, producing at least three quarters of a page of the answer booklet for part (a) and at least three pages for part (b). Only a few appeared to run out of time on the second part (b) question. Very few candidates answered either too many questions or only one question. Overall, candidates fulfilled the requirements in terms of quality of written communication, producing work written in continuous prose and with clarity of expression.

Most candidates demonstrated sociological knowledge and understanding by referring to theories, studies, concepts and relevant contemporary evidence. Some candidates needed to explain ideas more fully to show the extent of their knowledge and understanding and apply evidence in support of the point being made. The best answers were both wide-ranging and detailed and showed a broad and in-depth knowledge and understanding of the topic. Some responses were brief and needed a wider focus on different aspects of the topic. Others covered a range of issues but needed greater depth or development of evidence to achieve higher marks.

Part (a) Questions

Most candidates seemed to understand what was required by the instruction 'identify and explain', though many responses in the 'good' knowledge and understanding mark band, level 3, did not achieve level 4 because their answers were underdeveloped. An effective approach to achieve Level 4 is to identify two broad reasons/ways/factors that can be developed in a number of ways within the answer. For example citing 'legislation' rather than a specific Act allows the candidate to include a wider range of factors; similarly, 'changing norms and values' as a broad point gives scope for a variety of explanations to be included.

Many candidates correctly identified two points but some needed to be clearer in explicitly stating the point. A minority of candidates covered more than two points and a significant number of candidates did not clearly identify the two points they had chosen to address leaving this implicit in their answer.

Candidates can improve their marks by making sure that they:

- Carefully select the two points that can be best supported with evidence
- Consider if they can identify two broad points that can be developed in a number of ways within the answer – but overlap must be avoided
- Fully explain the two identified points with relevant sociological theories, studies, concepts and/or contemporary evidence to develop their answer.
- Choose two points that don't overlap
- Avoid lengthy and unnecessary introductions to part (a) answers before actually proceeding to identify and explain the two points
- Include only material that is required eg criticisms are not needed in part (a) questions as there are no marks for evaluation

Teachers' Tip for part (a) questions:

Candidates are advised to use a separate paragraph for each of the two points to be identified and explained. An effective format to start the first paragraph is, for example, 'One way in which...' The second paragraph can then begin with 'A second way in which...' Candidates should be encouraged to write about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page for a part (a) answer.

Part (b) Questions

Most candidates attempted to show knowledge of sociological concepts, theories and research in answering questions. Perspectives-based answers on the lines of 'functionalists would argue x while Marxists would argue y' should offer evidence to illustrate/support these arguments, for example, in the form of a study, example and/or statistical data.

Most candidates answered questions in a sociological rather than purely common sense manner and even the less developed responses usually included some references to sociological concepts, studies and/or theories. Most candidates were aware of the need to include alternative perspectives and arguments as part of their evaluation. In some cases, points of evaluation were presented without supporting evidence to develop the point.

Some candidates, who juxtaposed different views, needed to evaluate explicitly evidence and arguments and use evaluative language to assist this process.

Candidates can improve their marks by making sure that they:

- Include sufficient sociological evidence to demonstrate wide and detailed knowledge and understanding. The best responses made use of a range of sociological theories, concepts and/or studies.
- Carefully select the material to be included to make sure that it is relevant and used in such a way that it supports or refutes an argument being made and avoid simply listing evidence.
- Address different sides of the argument and support with evidence.
- Offer critical comments about evidence, weigh up arguments and draw a reasoned conclusion.
- Write an answer that covers at least 3 pages of the booklet.

Teachers' Tip on Knowledge and Understanding:

To achieve the highest marks in the skill of knowledge and understanding candidates are advised to show detailed understanding and so must learn as much about the evidence they are using as they can to be able to write about it in an informed way. Centres should aim to select teaching material that will best facilitate this process and use evidence that gives depth and detail.

The skill of interpretation and application is challenging to some candidates who tend to list evidence without applying it to the question.

Teachers' Tip on Interpretation and Application:

To achieve the highest marks in the skill of interpretation and application candidates are advised to select and apply different types of data including theories, concepts and/or contemporary evidence on various sides of the argument. Candidates should aim to identify the most relevant data and then show how this relates to the question, highlighting patterns and trends, supported with evidence where appropriate. Applying sociological material to the question can be enhanced by including phrases that explicitly use the wording of the question eg 'This study shows that radical feminists view relationships in the family as oppressive to women'.

Many candidates demonstrate very good skills in analysis and evaluation. Others need to avoid juxtaposing views by analysing arguments so that they can then evaluate the strengths and weaknesses. Analysis involves breaking down an argument to gain a clearer understanding. This is an essential stage in the evaluation process. A sustained evaluation is needed to achieve the best marks and this involves candidates using an evaluative tone from their introductory paragraph onwards so that evaluation is evident throughout their answer.

Teachers' Tip on Analysis and Evaluation:

A sustained evaluative approach can be demonstrated by candidates writing an evaluative introduction, making some pertinent evaluative points about studies, theories and ideas used, and summarising the different views in relation to the question. Candidates are advised to use key evaluative terms that signal that they are evaluating the evidence or the argument at a given point, for example, 'however', 'on the other hand', 'conversely', 'on the contrary', 'in contrast', 'this evidence can be criticised because...'

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1 (a)

Most candidates were able to identify two reasons and were differentiated in terms of the quality and quantity of explanation and development in their answers. The most popular explanations were changing social attitudes, higher expectations of marriage, the social position of women and legal changes. Understanding of legal changes, in the case of many responses, was quite basic with some simply stating it was easier to get a divorce. Many candidates cited the 1969 Act but, of these, many seemed unclear about the detail. For example some claimed it was the first time women had been able to file for divorce. Relatively few candidates seemed aware of other legislation and its impact.

Better answers tended to come from candidates who chose to focus on two broad reasons and to develop these with evidence such as studies and concepts. For example some candidates identified 'legal changes' as a reason and this enabled them to include divorce laws and other relevant legislation such as the Equal Pay Act. Some discussed 'changes in expectations', bringing in Fletcher's work together with references to Giddens and confluent love.

Using a broad approach like this enables candidates to show wide-ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding.

Question 1 (b)

Most candidates who answered this question had some understanding of New Right arguments. More basic responses tended to consider only one or two aspects; for example, the idea that the New Right favoured nuclear families and opposed lone parent families, but without explaining why. Weaker responses also often pointed to similarities between New Right and functionalist ideas and then spent much of their answer focusing on functionalism. Better answers were able to highlight differences as well as similarities between New Right and functionalist approaches in the analysis.

The best answers showed understanding of a range of New Right ideas including concerns about lone parents, cohabitation, divorce, same sex families and reconstituted families. Some candidates also made good use of material on social policy, highlighting the influence of New Right ideas on Conservative and to a lesser extent Labour governments. Better answers were able to apply the work of specific New Right theorists to the argument including Murray, Morgan, O'Neill, Dennis and Erdos and Marsland.

Candidates should be encouraged to include evaluation in their response rather than simply juxtaposing ideas from other perspectives. Stronger answers used other theories to explicitly criticise New Right views, these included feminism and postmodernism and in some cases Marxism as well.

Question 2 (a)

Most candidates had some understanding of this question but more basic responses were often rather common sense-based along the lines that women were doing more paid work and men were doing more housework with little development or sociological evidence.

Some candidates also produced a general discussion of joint conjugal roles without really clearly distinguishing two ways. Candidates should be reminded that they are not required to include evaluation in part (a) questions and therefore it was not necessary to include, for example, discussions of feminist arguments which suggested that men and women had not in fact become equal.

Some candidates showed very good understanding of sociological research, for example relating to changes in fatherhood (Burghes, Beck and Dermott) or to women's working lives (feminisation of labour market, Sharpe, genderquake, shift parenting, dual career families and statistical data on female employment).

Question 2 (b)

The vast majority of candidates identified the view as Marxist and showed at least a basic understanding of this. Weaker answers were often limited to one or two aspects of Marxist theory; for example, the idea that families reproduced the next generation of workers and/or socialising children into capitalist ideas.

Better answers were more wide-ranging but some tended to lump together a range of Marxist ideas and attribute them all to one writer such as Engels or Zaretsky. Weaker answers often showed rather narrow knowledge of Marxism and then gave more detailed but juxtaposed accounts of one or more other theories. Some candidates were unclear in their understanding of Marxism and argued that Marxists supported the ruling class and saw the family as beneficial.

The best answers were able to discuss a range of ways in which the family might serve the interests of the ruling class using relevant concepts and studies. Some candidates explored how neo-Marxist and radical approaches such as Cooper and Marcuse and Marxist-feminist approaches such as Benston and Ansley, might also support the view. Most candidates were able to offer some evaluation, in weaker responses typically juxtaposing functionalist views. Better answers used other theories to evaluate explicitly, often drawing on radical feminism and postmodernism as well as functionalism.

Question 3 (a)

There were few responses seen to this question. The best answers showed a clear understanding of two distinct reasons why women live longer than men, frequently citing the concept of 'learned helplessness', issues of masculinity, and men's employment or risky behaviour. Overall, most responses used sociological evidence of some kind although this tended to be a little under-developed in the way it was explained. To achieve level 4 of the mark band there needed to be wide-ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding shown. Some responses made evaluative comments, some of which were relevant to demonstrating knowledge and understanding but, from responses seen, this was generally not the most successful way of developing an explanation.

Question 3 (b)

Answers to this question could have discussed a number of aspects related to the interactionist approach such as labelling, master status, self-fulfilling prophecy, social control and stigma. Most candidates showed some understanding of the interactionist approach but were sometimes narrow in range. There was also some confusion shown in some responses where, for example,

functionalist and other perspectives were used as part of interactionist explanations. Most responses attempted to evaluate using alternative perspectives and the most successful tended to refer to structural, cultural and/or biological factors. Some answers offered a more wide-ranging set of counter arguments and included only a narrow discussion of interactionist explanations that demonstrated under-developed or less-informed sociological knowledge and understanding related to the question.

Question 4 (a)

Most answers to this question showed good knowledge and understanding of ill health and social class. The best responses typically identified issues related to material deprivation and cultural factors. Some responses supported the points made with studies such as Lobstein, which were used with some accuracy although some candidates gave only a brief outline of such evidence or were confused on the details of the study.

Question 4 (b)

There was a variety of responses to this question with some quite wide-ranging and others that were narrow and in need of development. The best answers located the view accurately and discussed a number of factors such as functions for society including Parson's sick role, medical expertise and altruism. Some candidates showed confusion in their knowledge and understanding and discussed Marxism, for example, as a perspective that agreed that medical professionals play a positive role in society. While most candidates showed some understanding of relevant material, answers were often quite narrow in their discussion and needed to include more in the way of supporting evidence.

Question 5 (a)

A range of different responses was seen on this question. Weaker responses were often rather brief and/or commonsensical, focusing on narrow examples such as gay bishops and women priests without developing the explanation with evidence. Better answers tended to be more theoretical and/or conceptual looking at issues such as secularisation, privatisation of religion, spiritual shopping, the rise of NAMs and NRMs and the rise of non-Christian religions such as Islam.

Question 5 (b)

There were some strong answers to this question, where candidates demonstrated a wide-ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding of different perspectives. Most candidates approached the question in a similar way, outlining a series of sociological explanations including some or all of functionalism, Marxism, Weberian, feminism and post-modernism.

Better answers were able to evaluate each explanation explicitly, and in a sustained way, and apply supporting studies and sociological evidence to develop their evaluation. Weaker answers often only briefly covered two approaches and offered little explicit evaluation. In questions of this kind, candidates need to avoid simply listing different views in a juxtaposition approach and should be prepared to evaluate as they discuss each perspective.

Question 6 (a)

This question was not generally well answered. Some responses were quite confused, particularly concerning religiosity and young people. Relevant answers were often rather common sense-based with little reference to sociological evidence. Most candidates had some understanding that older people were, in general, more religious. Good answers typically explained this in terms of the need of older people to address questions of mortality or having grown up in a less secular society. Most answers, however, missed the opportunity to cite

relevant studies such as Voas and Crockett and/or use concepts like the 'ageing' or 'generational' effect in support. Some candidates also pointed to the fact that NRMs tended to attract younger people but again, few responses developed the point with sociological evidence.

Question 6 (b)

Most candidates were able to offer some evidence both for and against the view and engaged with the secularisation debate in some form. Weaker responses often only included a few basic points on both sides and were not very sociological; for example, less people go to church versus the survival of faith schools. Better answers drew on secularisation theory such as Wilson and Bruce and offered specific criticisms of this such as the importance of 'believing without belonging' and problems of measuring belief. Good answers were also able to cite evidence of the continued significance of religion in society, for example, NRMs, the Kendal Project and the influence of religion in recent political debates eg on gay marriage.

The best answers included a wide range of factors in support of and against the view and they structured these clearly by paragraphing different elements of the debate. Some answers were quite unbalanced and offered little in the way of opposing views.

Question 7 (a)

Most candidates showed some sociological understanding of the question. A wide range of reasons was cited, mostly of some relevance though some candidates tended to focus on reasons for the emergence of youth culture rather than youth subcultures; for example, extension of the school leaving age and assisting in the transition to adulthood. These points could be made relevant to the question but some candidates did not make the link to youth subcultures. Factors identified included the role of the media, globalisation, affluence/consumerism and resistance to capitalism. Better answers tended to be more theoretical and conceptual and used examples of youth subcultures and/or sociological studies to illustrate and develop their points.

Question 7 (b)

This question produced a variety of responses and was generally quite well answered with most candidates showing understanding of ways in which gender is important. Most candidates pointed to research on Bedroom Culture and, in some cases, also highlighted more proactive female subcultures such as Riot Girls, New Wave Girls and Sk8ers. Some candidates also pointed to the male dominance of traditional spectacular subcultures with the stronger responses using relevant studies and examples in support. Some candidates also pointed to the role of girls in such subcultures as pillion passengers.

In evaluation, some candidates discussed the changing nature of masculinity and femininity. Some also referred to the emergence of less gendered subcultures such as goths and punks and to postmodern ideas about club cultures.

Other candidates also pointed out the importance of class and/or ethnicity in subcultures. Candidates did not tend to explain that in some subcultures class, gender and ethnicity were all important, for example citing groups such as Mods and Skinheads as evidence of the importance of class without acknowledging the gendered nature of such subcultures.

Question 8 (a)

Although most candidates showed some understanding of this question very few very good answers were seen. Some candidates produced largely irrelevant answers because they addressed reasons for gender differences in achievement rather than for subject choice. Some candidates also wasted time in describing how gender differences in subject choice were now

less apparent than in the past. Weaker responses were often rather under-developed and commonsensical; better answers cited factors such as innate ability, peer pressure, socialisation and future career aspirations. Only a few answers were fully developed with, for example, relevant research studies and concepts.

Question 8 (b)

A range of answers was seen on this question. Most candidates had some understanding of labelling but this was often under-developed. Many candidates seemed familiar with relevant concepts such as self-fulfilling prophecy, master status and moral panic but did not fully elaborate or apply these to the question. Better answers used examples of research to illustrate concepts, some focusing on crime; for example, labelling of black youth by police; some on youth subcultures such as Cohen's work on Mods and Rockers; and some on education, for example, Shain and Hargreaves.

A number of responses were quite narrow in support of the view and offered only a brief discussion of a couple of points with little in the way of supporting evidence. Most candidates showed knowledge of alternative explanations of youth deviance such as status frustration and relative deprivation. Weaker answers typically merely juxtaposed these; better answers used this material more evaluatively. Better candidates were also able to highlight criticisms of labelling theory, for example, by using studies showing groups rejecting labels.

G673 Power and Control

General Comments

Most candidates displayed wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of concepts and studies, producing two creditable essays. Some candidates did not include enough depth and the understanding displayed appeared superficial. In other cases, studies were described at length but not applied to the question set.

Theories were generally well understood and usually applied to the question in a clear way. There was often an understanding of differences within broad perspectives, and the way in which traditional theories influenced more recent ones, such as the link between functionalism and subcultural views.

There was a tendency across all questions for candidates to assert that certain sociologists said things which were clearly inaccurate, instead of *applying* potentially relevant ideas. For example – many candidates wrote in question 2 that Albert Cohen said that *ethnic minorities in the UK* experience status frustration. Similarly, there were candidates asserting that Durkheim said that *African Caribbean* boys were not socialised into the value consensus (in question 5), or that *Marx* discussed the hypodermic model, saying that the media brainwashes the audience (in question 7). All of these writers/ideas could have been effectively applied to the points made, but the assertive tone demonstrated lack of accurate understanding.

Interpretation and application was a weaker skill area than knowledge and understanding for most candidates; stronger responses continually related theories, concepts and studies to the question. Candidates should be encouraged to consider the material they have included in terms of how it relates to the question. Reflection in terms of asking themselves ‘so?’, ‘therefore?’, ‘how is this relevant?’ should be encouraged. The development of this skill would also avoid the tendency for many candidates to produce list-like answers. This was particularly common in the education option, for questions 5 and 6, and also in question 2 and in question 9. Even if an answer is not theoretically based, an attempt to locate evidence within an explanation or debate would avoid this.

Evaluation and analysis were generally strong, with most candidates including explicit evaluative points. Only the strongest candidates were able to sustain this into a critical commentary however, and there was still a tendency for undeveloped evaluative points to be put at the end of each paragraph by some candidates, which needed to be more fully developed and applied. A growing tendency noticed was the over-use of abbreviations, which were sometimes not explained, making answers difficult to follow.

There were very few rubric errors this session.

Comments on individual question

Question 1

This was completed by the majority of candidates choosing this option. Most candidates were able to discuss the functionalist analysis of crime and deviance accurately, with Durkheim covered at length. Sometimes examples were attributed to Durkheim that were actually the work of others, most commonly Kingsley Davis’s example of prostitution being a safety valve.

There was a confident use of relevant concepts, particularly ‘anomie’. Merton’s views were also very common, though there was a wide variance in the accuracy and depth of understanding here. Many candidates went on to make links to other sociologists influenced by functionalism,

with varying success, such as Hirschi, A.Cohen, and Cloward & Ohlin. Some successfully showed the links between these views and traditional functionalism; others were more confused. Contemporary examples were often successfully applied, for example, 9/11 or the August 2011 riots.

Functionalism was often described briefly at the beginning of the response before then launching into other theories so gaining little credit for knowledge and understanding of functionalism itself.

When writing their evaluation most candidates utilised Marxist views, and some also used interactionism. These often remained merely juxtaposed, but were sometimes used much more effectively, for example the neglect of corporate crime. Matza was also used extensively to evaluate the functionalist subcultural views, though some candidates wrongly asserted that he was also a functionalist subcultural theorist. The studies cited most often were Durkheim, Merton, Hirschi, A.Cohen.

Question 2

Most candidates started with an overview of the patterns of crime in terms of ethnicity shown by the OCS. Some candidates then discussed different methods of measuring crime, and lost focus on the question, which was about explanations for ethnic differences. Some statistics were also wildly inaccurate.

Many responses were wide-ranging, typically focusing on police racism and institutional racism. It was common that an empirical rather than a theoretical approach was taken here, though some did link in interactionism/labelling and/or Left Realism. A few candidates also applied other theories, such as functionalism and the 'host immigrant model', the New Right and Marxism/neo-Marxism.

The studies cited most often and theories referred to were Reiner, Holdaway, Scarman, Macpherson, Waddington, Lea and Young, Gilroy and Hall. Common concepts included institutional racism, canteen culture and Islamophobia, and these were often well-linked to examples, such as Stephen Lawrence (and often the stop and search complaints of his brother), the Panorama Secret Policeman investigation or 9/11.

Question 3

Some candidates were unable to focus on the police and courts so wrote generally about explanations for crime and deviance, unrelated to the question. Some of the content was similar to that used in question 2, with a focus on the police and racism, utilising similar studies and concepts (for example, Reiner, Holdaway, and canteen culture). Often media was discussed tangentially, and at length.

The police were tackled more confidently than the courts, utilising evidence, whereas even strong candidates sometimes struggled with any evidence in relation to the courts, with Miliband and Hood being the most well used. References to females were used strongly by some candidates with references to the chivalry thesis, androcentricism and double deviance, though there was often confusion as to the feminist take on these ideas.

As with question 2, theory was less commonly and effectively applied and many answers were essentially lists of studies or concepts. Engagement with the notion of 'social construction' was also not well done by many.

Evaluations tended to be the weakest skill as many candidates merely juxtaposed different ideas and were unable to assess the role of the police and courts although they were able to describe the role. The studies cited most often were Reiner, Holdaway, Skolnick, Hood, Cicourel and Hall.

Question 4

Most candidates contrasted the functionalist and Marxist views on education and its link to employment. Most addressed functionalism, and some merely evaluated this with Marxism, whereas others went into detail about how Marxists view the link as well. Though a good understanding of the main functionalist writers was seen, candidates were less successful at staying focussed on the question about preparing young people for employment, often only discussing the functionalist view of the role of education.

Weaker candidates spent the whole essay just presenting different perspectives on the role of education (for example, social democratic, new right, liberal) with little or no reference to the question. Most candidates wrote about secondary socialisation and discussed concepts such as ascribed and achieved status, universalistic and particularistic standards and meritocracy. Durkheim, Parsons and Davis and Moore featured in the majority of responses.

The idea of schools acting as a bridge between the home and the workplace was also written about by the majority of candidates. Most candidates wrote at some length about Davis and Moore and the notion of 'role allocation' and used this material to provide opportunities for evaluation. The concepts of social solidarity and value consensus also featured in most responses, usually in relation to Durkheim.

When considering Marxism, Bowles & Gintis and Althusser were the most common focus, with considerable depth on Bowles & Gintis, the hidden curriculum and the 'correspondence principle' often given. Some candidates used a different approach and wrote about vocational educational policies, but this tended to be less successful, with less depth and/or focus. The studies and writers most cited were Durkheim, Parsons, Davis and Moore, Bowles and Gintis, Althusser and Willis.

Question 5

The focus on outside factors was often too brief before candidates wrote, often at length, about inside school factors.

Some candidates showed excellent range and depth of knowledge on outside factors, utilising Sewell, Archer and Archer & Francis, Pryce, Modood, Strand and the Swann Report most typically. Slightly less successfully, some candidates used material relating to social class eg Bernstein, Hyman, Sugarman without demonstrating the relevance to ethnicity. Those who did make the link to ethnicity were rewarded.

Often, candidates were unable to differentiate between different ethnic groups, and there were many references to 'ethnics'. There was also confusion as to the use of the category 'Asians', with some clearly intending this to mean Chinese, yet others using it to mean Pakistani and Bangladeshi students – possibly a more specific approach is needed. There were often inaccuracies in the use of statistics.

Evaluation was usually related to the importance of inside school factors but often this became mere juxtaposition, and some candidates seemed to forget what the original question was about. Some strong responses successfully linked subculture and/or racism to both inside and outside factors.

Question 6

Many candidates were able to discuss some policies, typically ERA related policies such as league tables and the link to parentocracy; New Labour policies such as EMA and specialist schools; and also recent developments such as Academies and Free Schools. Often policies were described accurately but no attempt was made to address the focus of the question.

The links to diversity and choice, though made explicitly and effectively by stronger candidates, were often left implicit by others.

Some candidates had an impressive knowledge of policies but included so many policies that they were unable to manage their time to interpret and apply the knowledge to the question.

Many candidates were able to contextualise the policies in terms of New Labour and New Right perspectives on education and a minority of candidates explored the impact of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition on policies already established. Many candidates however, gave a list-like response, with little attempt at an argument or debate.

When writing their evaluation some candidates used coalition policies effectively, such as the increase in tuition fees, cutbacks to Surestart & EMA, and the increase of tuition fees to argue that recent policies have limited diversity and choice. The most utilised evaluation was that policies designed to increase choice and raise standards have led to greater inequalities as middle class parents use their cultural and material advantages to the benefit of their children. However, it was not uncommon in this question to see no explicit evaluation at all. The most commonly cited writers cited most commonly were Ball, Gerwitz, Bourdieu, Sutton Trust, Finn and De Waal.

Question 7

In stronger responses candidates were able to describe Marxist approaches and the hypodermic syringe model in some depth, typically writing about Packard, Bandura, Marcuse, Adorno, Miliband, Althusser or Gramsci. Often examples were used, for example, Jamie Bulger, and the August 2011 riots, though these were sometimes not dealt with in a critical manner but stated as fact.

Often candidates interpreted direct as immediate, so saw drip, drip as indirect rather than being direct over time. In stronger responses candidates were able to use the model in a more sophisticated way and some used hegemony to show how an ideology becomes hegemonic over time. The GUMG and Hall were used to make this point, with a link to the cultural effects model sometimes made.

Other models and concepts were used in a variety of ways – for example, the uses and gratifications model was usually used as evaluation, but some candidates argued that the effect was direct if the audience chose it to be; similarly the selective –filter model. Catharsis and sensitisation were also sometimes used to support the direct effects, and sometimes to challenge. Candidates who fully explained and applied their knowledge were able to make it relevant and creditable. Others, who clearly had a range of knowledge of different models, missed the opportunity for more credit by not applying their knowledge directly to the question.

There was also a lot of juxtaposition of indirect models with candidates merely listing different models without using them to criticise direct effect models.

Question 8

This produced quite narrow responses in general with most candidates focusing on the GUMG but not really demonstrating an awareness of the breadth of studies within their output. Alternatively, some candidates demonstrated good understanding of the neo-Marxist view but were unable to provide any substantiation. Where a good link to traditional Marxist views was made this was credited as knowledge.

Some candidates drifted away from the news and others confused traditional and neo-Marxist approaches.

Stronger responses showed a good awareness of relevant concepts such as agenda setting, news values, gatekeeping, hegemony, moral panics. Many mistakenly asserted that Galtung & Ruge were neo-Marxists, rather than just applying their work on news values.

By way of evaluation the most common approaches used traditional Marxism (eg Miliband) and/or pluralism to counter the neo-Marxist arguments. Some candidates were able to write much more fully on pluralist views than on neo-Marxists, thus losing focus on the question. The most commonly cited studies were from the GUMG, but also Hall.

Question 9

Candidates used a range of studies to illustrate negative stereotypes many focusing on Akinti, Van Dijk, Moore et al, Barker and Hall. Contemporary examples were also used extremely well in this question to develop ideas. Some candidates used contemporary examples at the expense of precise studies.

Often answers developed into a list, and many candidates did not locate their examples into a theoretical debate, which often led to very little in the way of evaluation. Those who did utilise theory used Marxist and neo-Marxist ideas, often linked to Hall and the 'white-eyed' view.

In candidates' evaluation, pluralism and post-modernism were the most frequent theories used, but more commonly evaluation was solely linked to positive representations, often related to the 2012 Olympians of minority ethnic minority origins (for example, Mo Farah, Jessica Ennis, Nicola Adams). Weaker responses strayed into a discussion about other stereotypes related to age, gender and social class without linking these to ethnicity.

Question 10

Contemporary examples, such as the Brixton riots and more commonly the August 2012 riots were well used, but candidates seemed to struggle to support their examples with sociological evidence. Bachrach & Baratz, Scarman, Kettle and Back were the most common references, and some tried to apply general Marxist ideas with varying success. Some identified riots as a form of direct action and wrote the rest of the answer on this, losing focus on the question.

Question 11

Wide-ranging knowledge of NSMs was shown, with some candidates writing in a very generalised way about definitions and types of NSMs, without really focussing on the question. Those who did attempt to focus on explanations often wrote a very small amount on Marxist views before quickly rejecting them in favour of identity based/ postmodern views, with varying success at focussing back on the question. The most commonly used names were Marcuse, Touraine, Habermas and Callinicos.

Question 12

This question produced some very strong responses, with a wide-ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding of both Classical and Radical Elite theories and also good application of Marxist views. Typical responses utilised Mosca, Pareto, Mills, Hywel Williams and Miliband. However, some candidates made a fleeting reference to Elite theories before rejecting them and spending more time discussing pluralist views on power, thus losing focus on the question. Also a focus just on Marxism was sometimes seen, sometimes by candidates who had clearly not studied this option.

Evaluation was usually related to pluralist critiques of elite theory, and contrasting the theories that have different views on the origins and motivations of the elites. Unfortunately, this readily became juxtaposition for some candidates.

G674 Exploring Social Inequality and Difference

General Comments

The paper is designed to test candidates' knowledge and understanding of social inequality and difference, and the connections between sociological theory and methods of sociological enquiry within this context. The paper is synoptic and linked to the core themes of power, social inequality, socialisation, culture and identity. In addition the paper tests candidates' ability to interpret and evaluate sociological theory, research and evidence, especially through the review of a research case study.

From the evidence of candidate responses, the source material and questions were understood and accessible to candidates of all abilities. The vast majority of candidates were able to respond to the questions appropriately and demonstrate positive achievement. The paper also differentiated successfully. As last year, it is pleasing to report that the standards attained were very good; candidates and centres are once again to be congratulated on their achievements.

In Section A, candidates are expected to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of different methodological perspectives or approaches to sociological research, for example feminist, positivist, interpretive and realist approaches. In addition candidates are expected to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research design and a range of methods. This is achieved through the analysis and evaluation of a case study of sociological research outlined in the source material.

In January 2013 the source material was adapted from 'Ageing in a 'Spectacular' Youth Culture: Continuity, Change and Community Amongst Older Goths', by Paul Hodgkinson, published in the *British Journal of Sociology* in 2011. The study used unstructured, qualitative interviews and participant observation as the main research methods, based upon a snowball sampling strategy.

In Section A, in order to evaluate the research strategy within the case study, candidates are expected to use a range of methodological concepts and approaches. It is therefore essential that candidates are familiar with and able to apply some of the key sociological methodological concepts, including valid, reliable, representative, generalisable and replicable. Centres should try to ensure that candidates know these key concepts and have had opportunity to apply them in the evaluation of research case studies during their courses. Understanding positivist, interpretive, realist and feminist approaches to methodology is also vital. It is important for candidates to encounter a range of research studies and have the opportunity to evaluate critically their methodology, evidence and conclusions during the course.

In Section B, candidates are expected to show knowledge and understanding of substantive topics in social inequality and difference and evaluate different theoretical perspectives, especially functionalist, Marxist, neo-Marxist, Weberian, post-modern and feminist.

In general, the compulsory questions on sociological research were answered very well and there were some excellent responses that demonstrated a well-developed knowledge and understanding of snowball sampling and qualitative methods. It was pleasing to see how many candidates were aware of the uses of different methods and could evaluate different forms of evidence, based on the method of collection, the source and different theoretical perspectives. Application to the specific case study was often sensitive and thoughtful, especially in relation to the youth cultural context, the use of unstructured, qualitative interviews and participant observation. Discussion of the need for reflexivity for an insider researcher was also present in a number of candidates' responses.

The optional questions in Section B on social class and age were also answered well. Candidates demonstrated very good levels of knowledge and understanding of social class inequality and evidence for upper class advantage. Many candidates also had a good grasp of Weberian approaches to social inequality; other approaches to social class inequality were used perceptively to evaluate these theories. The questions on age were also answered well, with many candidates demonstrating a very good knowledge and understanding of evidence of elderly disadvantage, as well as a range of theoretical explanations of age inequality.

In general, candidates seemed to benefit from careful individual preparation and support for this examination by centres. They had clearly undertaken stimulating, well-designed courses that were effective in developing the skills to be tested. In addition, examination technique was generally very good. Most candidates allocated time to questions appropriately and followed the instructions within the rubric well.

As in previous years, to improve performance further candidates should be encouraged to:

- answer the question set and refer back to the question regularly; this especially helps candidates to demonstrate the skill of interpretation and application
- use a variety of different forms of sociological evidence, which may be empirical studies, data, concepts, theory and contemporary examples
- refer to sociological concepts, studies and theory wherever relevant
- evaluate theories and research strategies by referring to both strengths and weaknesses
- avoid simple assertion, opinion and anecdotal evidence.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1

The majority of candidates answered this question very well, revealing a very good knowledge and understanding of snowball sampling and its uses in sociological research, drawing upon the information in the source material and their own background knowledge from across the specification to illustrate their responses.

Most candidates were able to explain that snowball samples are a selection of people to take part in the research by finding participants on the recommendation of others, usually through personal contacts. It is sometimes referred to as respondent-driven sampling or chain sampling. There is generally no sampling frame. The method is a form of purposive sampling and is a type of non-probability sampling. Many candidates related the method of sampling to methodological perspectives, recognising that positivist, interpretive, realist, feminist and other research perspectives all use snowball samples to gather quantitative and qualitative data, though they are more often associated with qualitative/interpretive approaches.

Candidates most frequently referred to the following uses of snowball samples:

- when the research population is not easy to find or contact, for example deviant groups or criminals; very sensitive areas of research for example victims of abuse
- to research groups like the deprived, the socially stigmatised and elites
- when the population is difficult to access or get permission to research
- when the population is rare and small
- to find experts in a particular field or a particular type of person relevant to the research that is not very common
- when the population is secretive, perhaps for legal or moral reasons
- to make the research more manageable/practical
- to reduce cost
- to reduce the time involved

- to ensure that the research is valid
- to ensure that the research is reliable
- to increase the representativeness of the sample
- to provide evidence to generalise to the wider population

A number of candidates aptly referred to different examples of sociological studies that had used snowball sampling taken from their general background knowledge to illustrate responses.

Candidates' best responses were related clearly and systematically to the source material, using the research by Hodkinson to illustrate their answers. Some candidates did not use the source and inevitably restricted the marks that could be gained. Centres should stress the need for candidates to use both the source and their own knowledge and understanding.

Some weakness in responses mainly related to candidates who did not focus on *snowball sampling and its uses in sociological research* but discussed the uses, or strengths and weaknesses, of sampling in general or other forms of sampling. Similarly, whilst the question asked candidates to outline and explain the uses of snowball sampling, some evaluated the research methods in the source. The question is designed to test knowledge and understanding (AO1) and interpretation and application (AO2a), so material presented by candidates on evaluation cannot be credited. A few candidates simply described snowball sampling but did not explain its uses.

Question 2

The majority of candidates answered this question well, revealing a very good knowledge and understanding of qualitative methods in sociological research, and related methodological issues, drawing upon the information in the source material and their own background knowledge to illustrate their responses.

The majority of candidates understood that qualitative methods within sociological research are generally regarded as the gathering of data and evidence that is in-depth, detailed and descriptive, rather than numerical or quantitative data in a statistical form. These methods usually focus on gathering information about the experience of social life from the point of view of the subjects/actors. They are used to gather information and evidence about the meaning and subjective understanding of those being researched. The research is usually small scale and at a micro-level.

Candidates also explained that qualitative methods tend to be high in validity and low in reliability, using these concepts appropriately, and recognised that these methods are favoured by interpretive and action theorists rather than positivist and structuralist approaches to research. Most candidates also demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the key methodological concepts of generalisability and representativeness through their discussion of these methods in context. Some of the most sophisticated responses also referred to feminist and realist methodological perspectives in their evaluation of Hodkinson's research into ageing within a Goth youth sub-culture.

Candidates also tended to refer to methodological issues and concepts such as: interpretive, positivist, realist, feminist, qualitative and quantitative data, empathy, verstehen, value freedom, reflexivity, ethnography, subjectivity and objectivity, replication and sample size. Most candidates discussed clearly the strengths and weaknesses of the view that qualitative methods are the best way to study ageing Goths in a balanced way. In evaluation, candidates generally referred to methodological issues and concepts such as:

- the influence of the researcher's culture, values and experience on the quality of data gathered, its interpretation and subsequent uses
- objectivity and subjectivity

- studying behaviour in natural settings
- ecological validity
- sample size effects
- representativeness of the sample
- replicable
- respondent validation
- desirable responses
- researcher effects
- researcher imposition
- the Hawthorne Effect
- subject and researcher biases
- fitness for purpose
- access and gatekeepers.

Ethical issues were sometimes raised, for example of confidentiality and the potential impact on the lives of those studied, including raising sensitive issues and ensuring absence of harm. Many demonstrated a deep understanding of the issues facing sociologists gaining access to youth subcultures and sensitively discussed the role of the insider researcher as illustrated in this case study.

Many candidates also contrasted interpretive to positive, critical, feminist or post-modern approaches to social research, showing skills of evaluation and analysis through this discussion.

The best responses were related clearly and systematically to the source material, using the research by Hodkinson to illustrate their answers, which were clearly related back to the central issue of *the 'fitness for purpose' of the methods used by Hodkinson*. Some candidates failed to use the source and inevitably restricted the marks that could be gained. Centres should stress the need to use both the source and their own knowledge and understanding.

Question 3 (a)

Candidates generally used their knowledge and understanding of the upper classes and advantage from different units within the specification, as well as the G674 unit itself. Most candidates correctly focused upon the relative advantage of different classes, including the upper, middle, working, underclass and elites.

Candidates tended to draw mainly upon their knowledge and understanding of upper class advantage within the class structure of the contemporary UK. The aspects of upper class advantage that were most frequently discussed are education, family, employment, income and wealth, poverty, health and welfare, housing, political power and patterns of crime and deviance.

The following concepts were often identified and discussed class, status, power, poverty, working, middle and upper class, elites and underclass, access to work and employment, the 'old boy network', social exclusion, marginalization, economic, cultural and social capital, social mobility, class identity and culture, dual labour markets and access to power and political representation.

Theoretical explanations for social class inequality were often identified and discussed, mainly including Marxist, neo-Marxist, functionalist and Weberian.

Candidates were most likely to outline evidence of upper class advantage and make reference to empirical studies in support of their responses. Some introduced relevant data and contemporary examples to good effect. The most effective responses made appropriate use of all these types of sociological evidence. Some candidates also introduced theoretical material.

Candidates gaining marks at the highest levels of response tended to link upper class lifestyle and life chances to evidence of advantage, sometimes comparing classes. This was supported by several different types of evidence, including empirical studies, data, concepts, theory and contemporary examples. The material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related back to the question.

Some candidates made very good use of contemporary examples, which tended to include:

- increasing gap between rich and poor and the distribution of wealth
- social closure and changing social mobility
- patterns in educational achievement
- unemployment and work experience in the economic recession/crisis
- reduction in welfare benefits
- recent changes in patterns of health across the social classes
- patterns of poverty.

Some candidates did not address the issue of advantage and simply described different forms of class inequality, which did not demonstrate an appropriate interpretation of the question.

Question 3 (b)

Candidates were expected to outline and assess Weberian approaches to explaining social class inequalities. The following concepts were often identified and discussed social action, culture and symbols, life chances, interests, status, power, class, party, underclass, exploitation and capitalism.

Candidates tended to refer to Weberian writers such as Weber, Barron and Norris, Giddens, Goldthorpe and Savage.

Social class inequalities in different aspects of social life were often used to illustrate answers, such as education, employment, income and wealth, health and welfare, housing, political power, and patterns of crime and deviance. Alternative theoretical explanations of social stratification were usually explored and/or juxtaposed, for example Marxist, neo-Marxist, functionalist, feminist and post-modern. The impact on social class of ethnicity, gender and age was sometimes compared or contrasted with class, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions.

Candidates evaluated Weberian explanations of social class inequality quite well, presenting a range of strengths and/or weaknesses of these approaches to understanding social class stratification. Arguments included:

- emphasises social action
- sees social change as a process of conflict over status and power
- theory may be applied to many societies
- emphasises importance of status and power in patterns of inequality
- underemphasises structural in society
- tends to neglect consensus and social order, in comparison to functionalist approaches
- underemphasises class and wealth in inequality, in comparison to Marxist approaches
- doesn't acknowledge the way other aspects of inequality may reinforce each other, for example, age, ethnicity and gender
- neglects changing nature, fluidity and eclectic nature of culture in post-modern society
- post-modern critiques – importance of identity and diversity; reduced impact of class

Comparison of alternative theoretical explanations was usually undertaken in evaluation.

Some candidates simply described and juxtaposed different theoretical approaches. More effective responses used alternative approaches to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of Weberian theory of social class inequality and each other, and also evaluated in a sustained and explicit manner throughout. The best responses also tended to conclude with a specific and clear assessment of Weberian and/or other explanations.

Candidates at the higher levels of response revealed an excellent ability to interpret sociological knowledge and understanding and apply it to an assessment of Weberian approaches to social inequality. The material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related to the question.

Weaker candidates tended to neglect a discussion of theoretical issues and often simply described social class inequality.

Question 4 (a)

The majority of candidates answered this question well. Candidates generally used their knowledge and understanding of patterns of age inequality for the elderly from different units within the specification, as well as the G674 unit itself. Most candidates correctly presented evidence about elderly disadvantage. The best responses tended to present a range of recent evidence about advantage with some contemporary examples and focus from the contemporary UK.

Aspects of social life for which changes in patterns of gender inequality were most often identified and discussed included employment, income and wealth, health and welfare, portrayal within the media, housing, political power and patterns of crime and deviance.

The following concepts were often identified and discussed:

- status
- poverty and material deprivation
- labour markets and occupational structure
- access to power and political representation
- income, pensions and wealth
- disengagement
- life course
- infantilisation
- image and consumer culture
- economic, social and cultural capital
- social exclusion
- marginalisation
- media images and stereotyping
- discrimination and prejudice
- age identity and culture
- sandwich generations and dependency.

Candidates most frequently referred to writers such as Pilcher, Parsons, Hockey and James, Bond et al, Vincent, Oakley, Gannon, Prout and James, Featherstone and Hepworth and Blaikie.

Theoretical explanations for age inequality identified and discussed included Marxist, functionalist, post-modern, Weberian and feminist. The impact on age inequality of ethnicity, age and class was sometimes compared or contrasted with ethnicity, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions.

Contemporary examples most often cited were:

- increasing gap between young, middle aged and elderly in the distribution of wealth
- recent patterns/changes in pension provision
- unemployment and work experience in the economic recession/crisis by age group
- patterns of poverty and material deprivation affecting the elderly
- recent concerns about the care of the elderly in the NHS
- the dependency of the elderly in families with reducing welfare benefits
- impact of increased taxation and withdrawal of benefits for the elderly.

Candidates were most likely to outline sociological evidence and make some reference to empirical studies. Some introduced relevant data and contemporary examples to good effect. The most effective responses made appropriate use of all these types of sociological evidence.

Candidates gaining marks at the highest levels of response tended to describe elderly disadvantage in a range of different areas of social life (often three or more areas) supported by several different types of evidence, including empirical studies, data, concepts, theory and contemporary examples.

Candidates at the higher levels of response revealed an excellent ability to interpret sociological knowledge and understanding and apply it to the issue of male advantage. The material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related to the question.

Some candidates did not address the issue of disadvantage and simply described different forms of age inequality, which did not demonstrate an appropriate interpretation of the question.

Question 4 (b)

The majority of candidates answered this question well. Candidates were expected to outline and assess sociological explanations of age inequalities.

Responses tended to describe and evaluate a range of explanations, comparing and contrasting alternative sociological theories, usually functionalist, Marxist, neo-Marxist, Weberian and post-modern.

Most candidates were able to describe a range of explanations at least simply with a few relevant concepts and studies. The best responses did so comprehensively in a wide-ranging and detailed manner. Some weaker responses tended to describe age inequality in a generalised way, or juxtaposed several explanations, but neglected evaluation and assessment, which was the main focus of the question.

The following concepts were often discussed socialisation and transmission, independence/dependence, disengagement, transition, political economy of age, class, status, power, socio-economic differences, reserve army of labour, subcultures and identity.

Candidates often referred to writers such as:

- functionalist – Parsons; Eisenstadt; Hockey and James; Cumming and Henry
- Marxist/Conflict – Bond, Briggs and Coleman; Townsend; Vincent; BCCCS
- feminist – Oakley; Firestone; Gannon; Wyness
- interpretive – Prout and James; Hockey and James
- post-modern approaches – Polemus; Pilcher; Featherstone and Hepworth; Blaikie.

The impact on age inequality of ethnicity, gender and class was occasionally compared or contrasted with age, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions.

Age inequalities in different aspects of social life were sometimes used to illustrate answers, such as education, employment, income and wealth, health and welfare, housing, political power, and patterns of crime and deviance.

As candidates were expected to compare and evaluate explanations of age inequality the main arguments tended to include:

- some provide understanding of social class and its impact on age inequality and conflict
- some explanations help to explain social change and others stability in age inequality
- some recognise economic/gender/ethnic dimension to age inequality more than others
- some focus on structural aspects of age inequality, others on social action
- some understand limits to social mobility and barriers to removal of age inequality
- some under-emphasise status, power and political processes in age inequality – as compared to Weberian approaches
- some do not recognise consensual aspects of social life – as compared to functionalist approaches
- some underestimate other aspects of inequality that are features of identity, culture and status – as compared to post-modern approaches
- some do not recognise patriarchal and feminist approaches to age inequality – as compared to feminist approaches.

Comparison of alternative theoretical explanations was usually undertaken. Some candidates simply described and juxtaposed different theoretical approaches. More effective responses used alternative approaches to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of different explanations, and evaluated in a sustained and explicit manner throughout. The best responses also tended to conclude the answer with a specific, clear assessment of different explanations, often suggesting the most effective.

Candidates at the higher levels of response revealed an excellent ability to interpret sociological knowledge and understanding and apply it to an assessment of feminist explanations of gender inequalities. The material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related to the question.

Weaker candidates tended to neglect a discussion of theoretical issues and often simply described age inequality.

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