AQA

General Certificate of Education

Sociology 2191

SCLY3   **Beliefs in Society;**

Global Development;

Mass Media;

Power and Politics

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

SCLY3

Section A – Beliefs In Society

General

Disappointingly, far too many candidates appear to have little knowledge or comprehension of the religions which they cite as evidence in their answers. For example, many candidates seem to think Catholicism is a separate belief from Christianity, and there were numerous references to Britain being run by the Catholic Church. Similarly, many candidates seemed firmly convinced that the entire population of Britain were in the thrall of the church in the 1960s, and that the Queen is a Catholic. There is a similarly high level of ignorance about other religions, such as Islam or Buddhism. Such a lack of understanding undermined the arguments that candidates were trying to put forward.

Question 01

Many candidates did well on this question. The most common responses focused on ending personal crises, thus removing the need to be a member of a sect; finding rules too strict; spiritual shopping; losing enthusiasm for membership; and the death of a charismatic leader. Unfortunately, some candidates misinterpreted the question to give reasons why sects, as opposed to membership, were short-lived and gave organisational or structural factors as reasons for their demise.

As has become common with these questions, a number of candidates failed fully to explain the point that they had identified and thus did not score all the marks available. Similarly, some candidates set out their answer in continuous prose, thus making it difficult for the examiners to discern where each of the three identifications and explanations started and finished.

Better answers were characterised by:

- a clear reference to membership or to members or individuals;
- a clear structure (eg by writing three separate paragraphs);
- succinct explanations;
- being able to explain *why* the death of a charismatic leader could make a sect short-lived;
- being able to distinguish between cults and sects (many candidates wrote about features of cults).

Question 02

Most candidates gave reasons for the decline of traditional churches and the growth of sects and cults. Fewer linked these trends to the theme of the question to argue whether sects and cults were actually replacing traditional churches. However, there were many competent answers showing clearly that this area of beliefs is well taught by centres and well understood by candidates. Less successful candidates produced answers that tried to state all that they knew about cults and sects. Particularly worrying was the assumption made that, as religious attendance at traditional churches went down, everyone rushed off to join sects and cults.

Question 03

This question touched on a new area of the specification and was the less popular of the two 33-mark questions. Of those candidates who attempted this question the usual approach was to present a 'science-versus-religion' answer. In this, arguments and evidence were put together to show how science had become more influential and religion less influential. References to Popper, Kuhn, Weber and Lyotard were common. Many candidates broadened their answer to make reference to the influence of Marxism and/or feminism. Few candidates really got to grips with the notion of ideology but there were some very good answers showing skills in reworking material that previously might have found a place in a 'secularisation' answer.

Question 04

This was the more popular of the two 33-mark questions on beliefs. It was well answered by many candidates and very well answered by some. Most responses focused on the role of religions in oppressing women and presented a range of studies or evidence to make their case. Answers were differentiated by the degree of detail and referencing to specific authors that candidates could present. Most candidates used Marxist and functionalist perspectives as evaluative material. A minority used postmodernist views. Holm, El Saadawi, Althusser, Parsons, Daly, de Beauvoir and Bird were the sources that featured most regularly in answers. Weaker answers briefly discussed women in religion then recited all they knew about Marxism and functionalism, sometimes making evaluative points in passing but not fully addressing the question.

Section B – Global Development

Question 05

Candidates often seem to find questions asking for criticisms difficult, even when they have the knowledge to answer them. It would be helpful for candidates to practise responses to this type of question, so that they can develop an approach that fully answers the question. In this instance, the criticisms most frequently identified were that dependency theorists were too negative, too ideological, offered alternatives that did not work, and/or ignored the successes of capitalism or the benefits of a global free trade system. A minority of candidates misinterpreted the question and put forward criticisms made *by* (rather than of) dependency theorists, and thus scored no marks.

Question 06

There was a variety of approaches to this question. Some candidates saw this as a traditional 'modernisation-versus-dependency-theory' answer and stayed with comments of a largely theoretical nature. Other candidates ran through a list of global environmental disasters and sought to blame development for these. A minority of candidates managed to combine the theoretical and empirical aspects of the topic to produce a much more rounded and successful response.

Question 07

Knowledge and understanding of this topic seems to have improved. Many candidates gave very full answers that included reference to a range of positive and negative features of urbanisation and linked these to one or more of the theoretical perspectives. Issues and concepts such as urban sprawl, neo-colonialism, agribusiness and push and pull factors featured in many answers. The feature most often missing from answers was a response to the 'necessary and desirable' aspect of the question, with most candidates simply providing an answer to the question, 'what are the consequences of urbanisation?'

Question 08

This was the more popular 33-mark essay in the Global Development section. Many candidates' knowledge of the role of transnational corporations was extensive and detailed. Issues such as employment, tax-free zones, education and training, cultural change, export-led development, neo-colonialism, trickle-down, and the international division of labour featured in many answers.

A common failing of candidates was to focus only on the negative features of transnational corporations (TNCs). Such answers saw little to cheer about from the spread and growth of such organisations. More balanced answers often used Rostow to highlight the positive features of development through the expansion of TNCs. Disappointingly, some candidates' knowledge of TNCs did not go beyond Coca-Cola and Nike.

Section C – Mass Media

Question 09

This question was well answered by many candidates. News values most commonly cited were importance, reference to elite persons, unexpectedness, reference to elite nations, relevance to the audience, and cultural proximity. The range of points made by candidates was very wide indeed, though in some cases it seemed as if they were answers to the January 2010 question. In such instances, gate-keeping, agenda-setting and similar concepts featured erroneously. Many candidates scored by drawing on the news values identified by sources such as Galtung and Ruge.

Question 10

Many answers here were disappointingly narrow in focus. Most candidates managed to list several examples of new media, but few were able to develop answers to show the impact these have had on the way in which the mass media operate in society today and/or the way that audiences relate to the media. Some weaker answers ignored the word 'new' in the question and discussed media in general. Some candidates based their answers solely on the production of news; others simply discussed the spread of the internet. Examiners would have welcomed more on features such as interactivity, democratisation, narrowcasting, issues of control and agenda-setting.

Question 11

This question was the more popular of the two in Section C. It was usually answered well and sometimes very well. Candidates were familiar with Marxist and neo-Marxist views and usually used pluralist views as a critique. Most answers focused on the theoretical debates. However, empirical material was in short supply beyond the usual references to News International.

The most successful candidates:

- set their answers in a more contemporary, global framework, often referencing postmodernist studies by way of a critique;
- could demonstrate an understanding of the differences between traditional Marxist theory and neo-Marxist variants;
- did not treat ownership and control as one and the same thing;
- made sure that, if they introduced 'audience effects' material, they related it explicitly to the question.

Question 12

The term 'popular culture' gave some candidates difficulty; others spent a considerable part of the essay distinguishing between low culture, high culture, popular culture and mass culture. Some responses examined the impact of the media on culture as a whole in a fairly list-like fashion, usually relying on asserted points by way of evaluation. Other candidates looked at the impact of modern phenomena such as reality TV and social networking sites. Many candidates set out generalised or descriptive definitions of mass culture and high culture, and then argued that the distinction had become blurred through the impact of digital technology and greater affluence. More confident candidates explored postmodernist views in more detail, for example from Strinati, and took this process through to the development of a global culture.

Section D – Power and Politics

Question 13

Candidates most often cited the loss of power and control by states, international collaboration and partnerships, the growth of supra-state bodies, a 24-hour news agenda, different information flows, and national borders becoming less relevant. Points were usually explained competently, often with examples.

Most candidates were able to reference one or two of the above 'Identification' points in the mark scheme, although some fell into the 'umbrella' trap of, for example, citing the increasing power of the EU as one way and then giving three examples of that increased power. Some candidates simply listed features of globalisation but did not really tie these into power and politics.

Question 14

Answers to this question were often perplexing. Given that the question included the word 'today', and that the United Kingdom had recently gone through a General Election, it was expected that a range of issues and examples would be drawn from that period, possibly including discussions of blogging, tweeting, ministerial debates and so on. However, this was rarely the case. Instead, many candidates were still quoting 'It was the Sun wot won it' and issues from as far back as the 1970s rather than making reference to recent events. The growth and influence of the new media seem to have passed many candidates by. Of those candidates who did make reference to recent events, many simply described the events rather than related them to answer the question set.

Question 15

After the disappointing responses to Question 14, it was pleasing to see some very good responses to this question. Candidates considered a range of different actions available to protesters and placed the choice in the context of political argument. Contrasts between new social movements and old social movements were drawn out in considerable detail. Numerous examples were included and many candidates took a global rather than a national framework for their discussion.

Question 16

Answers to this question were rarely of high quality. It is surprising that many candidates found this question so difficult, given that the topic is not new. Most answers focused on changes in the Labour Party in the Blair era and/or on changes brought about in the Conservative Party by David Cameron. Very few candidates were able to detail the range of functions fulfilled by political parties. Such a list might have included policy making, political recruitment and education, electoral organisation at different levels, and seeking and wielding power at all levels of government and administration. Similarly, very few answers included anything about minor parties such as the Green Party, nationalist parties, protest parties, or indeed anything beyond the three main parties. Indeed, many candidates still wrote of only a two-party system operating in the UK. Comparative material from, for example, the USA was very rarely mentioned.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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