AQA

General Certificate of Education

Sociology 1191

SCLY2 Education with Research Methods; Health with Research Methods

Report on the Examination
2011 examination – January series

SCLY2

General

Most candidates complied with the rubric, although some had difficulty in managing their time appropriately. In particular, the last question attempted (usually Question 09 or Question 18) often produced a much shorter answer than would be warranted for a 20-mark question (and considerably shorter than the answers that the same candidates had written to the other two 20-mark questions). Conversely, answers to some of the 2-, 4- and 6-mark questions were often considerably longer than necessary to gain full marks. Centres should impress upon their candidates the need to write answers commensurate with the marks available for the different questions on this paper. It is also recommended that candidates practise answering both high- and low-mark questions under timed conditions.

For some candidates, the 'methods in context' questions (Question 05 and Question 14) continue to be a source of under-performance, the principal source of which is a failure to demonstrate the skill of Application. While the majority of candidates showed a reasonable knowledge of the strengths and limitations of the method they had selected, most made little attempt to apply this to the study of the issue specified in the question. The key to successful answers here is to identify connections between specific strengths and/or limitations of the method and specific features of the particular issue in the question, and then to explain these links.

In a significant minority of cases, candidates' handwriting proved very difficult to read. In the interests of these candidates, teachers and centres are strongly advised to take the appropriate steps to ensure that either the candidates have an amanuensis or are permitted to word-process their answers. For further information and advice, please see the AQA website http://web.aqa.org.uk/admin/p_special_2.php or email specialneeds@aqa.org.uk.

Section A – Education with Research Methods

The great majority of candidates chose this Section.

Question 01

Most candidates succeeded in gaining both marks. Common reasons for gaining only one mark included giving only an example (such as lack of visits to museums or other educationally beneficial experiences) and not an explanation, and failure to explain, define or find an appropriate synonym for one of the two terms. Some candidates confused cultural with material deprivation and scored no marks.

Question 02

Most candidates could identify one or more relevant educational policies, such as the tripartite system, marketisation policies and vocational education aimed at working-class pupils. However, some took the question to mean any policy having *any* effect, rather than those that helped to produce or widen class differences in achievement. Many candidates wasted time describing their chosen policies in unnecessary detail, rather than simply identifying each policy and moving straight on to the next. A few had little or no idea of the meaning of 'policy' and offered various suggestions that were not credit-worthy, such as labelling or the elaborated code.

Question 03

Most candidates were able to identify some relevant factors outside the education system that may have contributed to girls' improved educational achievement. However, weaker answers were often unable to distinguish such external factors from ones within the education system. Some candidates identified external factors such as girls spending their leisure time reading, without being able to show that there had been any *change* in such factors that might account for their recently improved performance. Others lost their focus on the question and drifted into accounts of boys' under-achievement. The best answers identified factors such as changes in girls' priorities and in family structure, greater career opportunities, workplace equality legislation, the impact of feminism etc, and were able to relate these explicitly to girls' improved educational achievement.

Question 04

Some weak responses were limited to either recycling material from Item A or to offering thin, undeveloped versions of one or more theories, often with errors. For example, the concept of the hidden curriculum was sometimes inaccurately located within functionalism. Many answers contained lengthy tangential sections on differential achievement, labelling etc, with minimal linkage to the question of the relationship between education and future work roles. However, most candidates were able to offer some account of functionalism and/or Marxism, while a minority also included material on feminism. Relatively few candidates were able to clearly distinguish between preparation and selection; many conflated the two or largely ignored one of them (more often, selection), while some simply listed various functions of the education system without using this knowledge evaluatively to discuss whether preparation and selection might be its main function(s).

Question 05

As in previous examination series, many answers were confined to an account of some of the general practical, theoretical and/or ethical strengths and limitations of their chosen method (for example, that questionnaires may produce reliable but not valid data) with only passing reference to the issue of parents' role in pupils' achievement, often in the form of a phrase or two recycled from Item B. This indicates that some centres are not yet giving due weight to the 'in context' dimension of the 'methods in context' question and to the need to *apply* knowledge of the chosen method to the particular issue in the question.

Of those candidates who did seek to apply their knowledge of the method to the issue, most focused on issues relating to studying parents (rather than, say, pupils or teachers, both of whom might also throw light on the role of parents). Often, these answers focused on the possibility that parents might misleadingly seek to present themselves as model parents, or on the difficulties of accessing some parents.

The best answers were able to identify and explain possible connections between the method and the issue in the question. For example, some candidates developed the idea that parents who themselves had under-achieved might feel that they were being blamed for their children's failure and that a sensitive, flexible method such as an unstructured interview, which allows the researcher to build trust, might help to overcome this barrier.

Question 06

Most candidates understood the meaning of 'primary' data, although some were unable to articulate this clearly and often scored only one mark, sometimes for an appropriate example of a method yielding primary data.

Question 07

Most candidates could offer two acceptable disadvantages for the use of structured interviews, such as inflexibility, superficiality, lack of validity or imposition of researcher's categories and priorities on interviewees. Some candidates offered very general disadvantages of structured interviews such as that they are costly or time-consuming; these failed to score unless they were made as part of an appropriate explicit contrast with another method. A few candidates wrote about the disadvantages of *unstructured* interviews and therefore scored no marks.

Question 08

Most candidates scored well on this question, typically referring to greater reliability or control over variables as the advantage, and to the Hawthorne effect, artificiality of the setting, or lack of ecological validity as the disadvantage.

Question 09

There were some very brief answers to this question. For some candidates, this was due to bad time management but, for others, it resulted from a lack of basic knowledge about documents as a source of data. Some weaker answers confused the 'firsthand' nature of personal documents such as diaries with the notion that they were thus a source of primary data. Many answers were decidedly short on specific examples of documents, the most commonly cited being diaries and letters. However, better answers sometimes extended the range to include photographs and paintings, notes passed by pupils in class, government reports and autobiographies.

Most candidates succeeded in identifying a few advantages of personal and/or historical documents. These were usually practical (accessibility, time and cost) or theoretical (offering valid data and being favoured by interpretivists). However, many answers were sweeping in their assertion of such advantages, often missing opportunities for evaluation by qualifying some of the identified advantages (for example, while some documents may be accessible, others are unavailable, untranslated etc). Such disadvantages, when linked explicitly to a stated advantage, scored evaluation marks, but lists of random disadvantages, unconnected to any advantage previously identified, failed to score. Overall, the limited number of high quality responses suggests that centres are not preparing thoroughly for this topic.

Section B – Health with Research Methods

Only a small minority of candidates chose this Section.

Question 10

Few candidates were able to define or explain the meaning of diseases of affluence satisfactorily, although a few managed to score one mark for a suitable example, such as obesity. The considerable variety of incorrect answers offered suggests that centres were unprepared for this question. The minority who scored both marks usually defined them simply as diseases of the rich. A few did manage to link diseases of affluence to lifestyle, but not to wealth (and some saw them as diseases of poverty).

Question 11

This question was generally well answered, with many candidates gaining full marks. The most common reasons for not doing so were to drift into the World Health Organisation definition of health or into the characteristics of the sick role, or to give the same characteristic in two ways.

Question 12

The term 'culture' in the question triggered many to respond with reference to ethnic minorities to the exclusion of social class. A surprising number also focused on health care rather than health chances, while others indiscriminately listed various material factors alongside or in place of cultural/behavioural ones, seemingly with no understanding of the difference between the two. Some of those candidates who did adopt the appropriate focus unfortunately did not get beyond merely identifying factors such as smoking, drinking, exercise and diet. Many candidates showed little appreciation of the possible relationship between cultural factors and behavioural factors (for example, that lack of deferred gratification in working-class subculture might lead to more health-damaging hedonistic behaviour such as smoking).

Question 13

Most answers addressed both ethnicity and gender, though many weaker answers struggled to go much beyond Item C, while some merely asserted the existence of prejudice and discrimination in the NHS without evidence. Some answers drifted into accounts of differences in health chances rather than remaining focused on health care. However, most answers were able to identify a number of relevant factors, such as institutional racism, language barriers, traditional health care practices of some ethnic groups, patriarchy/sexism in the NHS, health care settings as gendered spaces, and women's caring role bringing them into greater contact with doctors. Better answers were distinguished by being analytic or evaluative rather than merely descriptive, with appropriate theoretical or research content.

Question 14

Participant observation was by far the more popular choice of method here, but the level of knowledge and understanding of the method was often – and somewhat surprisingly – rather limited. For example, some candidates systematically confused overt and covert variants. This shortcoming in turn restricted many in their attempts to relate the strengths and limitations of the method successfully to mental illness. However, even candidates who did show a working grasp of the main features of their chosen method – whether participant observation or official statistics – rarely made any significant application of this knowledge to the issue of mental illness. Some answers focused on recounting the findings of various studies of the nature and/or distribution of mental illness (usually Rosenhan or Goffman, and with Rosenhan wrongly seen as a participant observation study rather than a field experiment). Such answers failed to

use these studies to illustrate the strengths or limitations of the method and demonstrated that they had not understood the nature of the methods in context task. The few answers on official statistics were similarly lacking in application skills.

Question 15

Most candidates understood the meaning of 'primary' data, although some were unable to articulate this clearly and often scored only one mark, sometimes for an appropriate example of a method yielding primary data.

Question 16

Most candidates could offer two acceptable disadvantages for the use of structured interviews, such as inflexibility, superficiality, lack of validity or imposition of researcher's categories and priorities on interviewees. Some candidates offered very general disadvantages of structured interviews such as that they are costly or time-consuming; these failed to score unless they were made as part of an appropriate explicit contrast with another method. A few candidates wrote about the disadvantages of *unstructured* interviews and therefore scored no marks.

Question 17

Most candidates scored well on this question, typically referring to greater reliability or control over variables as the advantage, and to the Hawthorne effect, artificiality of the setting, or lack of ecological validity as the disadvantage.

Question 18

There were some very brief answers to this question. For some candidates, this was due to bad time management but, for others, it resulted from a lack of basic knowledge about documents as a source of data. Some weaker answers confused the 'firsthand' nature of personal documents such as diaries with the notion that they were thus a source of primary data. Many answers were decidedly short on specific examples of documents, the most commonly cited being diaries and letters. However, better answers sometimes extended the range to include photographs and paintings, notes passed by pupils in class, government reports and autobiographies.

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Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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