AQA

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

Sociology   SCLY1

(Specification 1191)

**Unit 1: Culture and Identity;
           Families and Households;
           Wealth, Poverty and Welfare**

Report on the Examination

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SCLY1

General

There were very few rubric errors and generally students seem to be very familiar with the demands of the examination. Most students seemed able to manage their time appropriately and leave enough time for the final essay. However, there is a tendency of some students to write too much for the six-mark question when more concise answers to the three parts could achieve full marks. Conversely, some students go to the other extreme and write one word answers which are rarely sufficient enough to achieve two marks. In the 24-mark essay questions many students ignore the specific wording of the question. Many of these students demonstrate a range of knowledge and understanding of sociology, but fail to apply their knowledge to the question (for example Question 10) or they miss out a significant aspect of the question (for example Question 09).

Section A – Culture and Identity

Question 01

Most students were able to achieve some credit for explaining the meaning of the term 'subculture'. However, many achieved only one mark by answering only 'culture within a culture', or by simply giving an example. More successful answers included a full explanation that recognised that subcultures have values and norms that distinguish them from the mainstream.

Question 02

Despite the content of Item 1A, a number of students seemed unaware of what postmodernists actually say about leisure and hence found it difficult to offer criticisms. Many students were able to offer at least one criticism of the postmodernist view of leisure. Popular responses included the idea that leisure choices are constrained by social position, or the lack of genuine choice available.

Question 03

Many students had difficulty with the notion of national identity and either confused it with ethnic and/or cultural identity or simply identified different agencies of socialisation with no explicit link to the question. Less effective responses tended to give highly generic ways in which culture can be transmitted (eg via the media and education), while the more effective answers were able to suggest distinctive ways of transmitting national identity. The teaching of history in schools, the possession of a common language, taking part in national celebrations, and the use of national symbols were popular and appropriate responses.

Question 04

There were a range of responses to this question. The best answers were characterised by well-focused conceptual knowledge discussing mass culture (eg Marxist/Frankfurt School material) and global culture via ideas such as Americanisation and cultural hybridity. Some highly effective answers created contrasts between different types of culture and/or theoretical debates over the impact/causes of a specific form. Global culture and mass culture were the most common choices and were often the basis of the most effective discussions. A significant minority of answers conflated popular culture and mass culture. Less effective answers tended to focus on examples of a form of culture with minimal sociological commentary, or on generic discussion of culture with weak links to a particular form.

Question 05

Many responses were able to score in the middle band of the mark scheme by using material in Item 1B to develop an interactionist account of the shaping of social identity and offering alternative material from a range of perspectives such as Marxism, feminism and postmodernism. More effective answers were able to employ a range of interactionist material (Goffman, Becker, Mead and Cooley were popular sources) and to tailor other theories towards a discussion of the shaping of social identity and a genuine evaluation of social action theory, often through a Structure vs Action framework. However, many students discussed structural theories in a juxtaposed manner and these often drifted into accounts of socialisation and/or culture, with little attention to the shaping of social identity. A number of students did not develop the interactionist aspect of the question at all and struggled to apply their material to any notion of identity being shaped by interactions with others.

Section B – Families and Households

The majority of students answered the questions in this section.

Question 06

Most students successfully explained the meaning of the term 'dual burden'. Several students conflated the term with 'triple shift' and, while this did not prevent many identifying the important features of dual burden (employment, and doing most/all domestic labour), those who offered only domestic labour and emotion work scored only one mark. Some students suggested that dual burden meant that household tasks were shared equally between partners and therefore failed to score any marks.

Question 07

Most students achieved full marks by identifying the 'caring' aspect of the expressive role and the 'providing' nature of the instrumental role. Some limited their marks by transposing the definitions, or by only identifying associated tasks such as 'doing housework'. A minority gave answers such as 'the role performed by the husband' and scored no marks.

Question 08

Many students failed to read the question properly and saw it as a chance to explain how childhood has changed rather than focusing on the ways in which the differences between children and adults are becoming less clear. This led to some students indiscriminately identifying features of contemporary childhood that sometimes hit the target, but also providing answers that suggested increasing separation between adults and children. The most common correct answers linked to the idea of children having more access to the adult world via the media, the greater commercialisation of children, and children and adults wearing similar clothing. Some students were able to approach the blurring issue by identifying the way that many adults stay living with their parents until their mid-thirties, and also that education is no longer confined to children.

Question 09

This question asked students to discuss the reasons for and the effects of changes in family size over the last 100 years or so. This proved to be quite difficult for a number of students, who failed to read or understand the question and therefore failed to interpret it successfully. Many students wrote extensively about the reasons for changes in family size without ever mentioning any effects of these changes. Other answers ignored the issue of family size and wrote generally about family change and diversity without explicit mention of family size. However, many successful answers were able to identify a range of reasons for the reduction in family size such as the changing position of women, the development of contraception, the increasingly costly nature of child-rearing, the impact of divorce, and the decline in infant mortality. Weaker answers tended to discuss family diversity with limited application to size. The minority who did effectively address effects tended to focus on changes in the dependency ratio; some were able to discuss child-centredness and female emancipation as a consequence of having few or no children. Some students were able to use theories (predominantly postmodernism and Liberal feminism) and sociologists such as Sharpe and Stacey to good effect, although a desire to employ concepts and named sociologists often distracted from a good focus leading to some largely irrelevant and often lengthy usage of Murdock and Parsons, in particular. Many students have very hazy ideas about what might fall into the category of the last 100 years or so, with often long discussions of pre-industrial Britain that struggled to get to grips with the question.

Question 10

Many successful answers were able to identify and discuss the impact of a range of government policies and laws drawn from and beyond Item 2B (eg divorce, introduction of Civil Partnerships, adoption policies, the tax and benefit system). Strong answers effectively provided commentary from New Right, various feminist approaches, postmodernist and Marxist views. Some students juxtaposed these, but others managed to provide genuine evaluation, eg through criticising the New Right view that benefits cause dependency. Some weaker answers added little to the Item, or provided generic accounts of theory that had little connection to policy. Some students discussed 'policy' in general but, while this was acceptable, these answers often failed to focus sufficiently on impact. Some excellent answers took sociological views as the basis for their answer and were able to discuss a range of policies and laws and their impact within the context of different sociological perspectives and evaluate these views. The question did not confine 'policy' to the UK and some students made effective use of examples from China, Romania, Nazi Germany and the USSR in the form of contrast to the UK, although these answers often struggled to discuss sociological views of these policies.

Section C – Wealth, Poverty and Welfare

Few students answered the questions in this section.

Question 11

Most students identified problems of measuring wealth such as the tendency of the wealthy to conceal their wealth and the tendency of the value of assets such as housing to fluctuate over time.

Question 12

Most students suggested at least one way in which wealthy individuals are able to remain wealthy with investment, the use of talent and the avoidance of taxation as popular responses. Some students failed to get the second set of two marks by offering several different variations in which investment could be made, or tax avoided, rather than identifying a separate way in which wealthy individuals remain wealthy.

Question 13

Most students showed a clear understanding of the concept of relative poverty, but many suggested characteristics (eg that the 'poverty line' shifts over time) without going on to say why this was a problem. Those that achieved the available marks tended to rely on a developed version of this point, or suggestions about the subjective nature of where the line is drawn, or the difficulty of developing indexes that use certain goods or experiences to define a 'normal' standard of living.

Question 14

Most students were able to suggest an appropriate range of reasons why women are more likely than men to experience poverty, such as 'the glass ceiling', the difficulty of sustaining a career, childcare responsibilities as a lone parent, and lengthy periods of old age with lower pensions as appropriate material. The extent to which conceptual and empirical knowledge and/or analysis was applied to this material largely determined the success of answers. While some students offered pertinent evaluation (eg the extent to which some factors may affect women at different ages), others appeared to believe that unconnected paragraphs about ethnicity causing poverty constituted evaluation. Other students suggested factors that cause poverty, but simply asserted that women are more likely to experience them without any discussion or evidence as to why this might be the case.

Question 15

Most students used Item 3B to contrast Social Democratic and New Right approaches to welfare benefits. The best answers offered well-focused and informed discussion of means-tested and universal provision, using ideas such as the poverty trap, the stigma attached to claiming benefits, administration costs and the wisdom of providing benefits to the very wealthy. Some excellent answers made use of the debate about child benefits as a focus of their discussion. However, several students appeared unclear about the distinction between targeted and universal benefits, resulting in flawed claims about their value. Other weaker answers discussed the pros and cons of benefits in general, with little regard to universalism or targeting.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website: http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion