AQA

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

Sociology   SCLY3

(Specification 2191)

**Unit 3: Beliefs in Society;
            Global Development;
            Mass media;
            Power and Politics**

Report on the Examination

SCLY3

Section A – Beliefs in Society

Question 01

This question was answered well by most students. Cultural defence, cultural transition and identity were the three most common reasons mentioned by students. Some students ignored the 'seem to be' aspect of the question and answered on the basis that minority ethnic groups are more religious. This sometimes resulted in a relevant answer but in some cases it took students off the question. A fairly common error was to provide reasons that were too similar to each other and therefore the answer could not score full marks.

Question 02

This question elicited a range of different approaches. Some students focused on religious organisations, while others tailored a more traditional secularisation answer to the question. Many students ignored the 'lifelong membership' aspect of the question and simply wrote on the decline or growth of religious belief, which limited their marks.

Many students took their lead from the Item and focused initially on postmodernist views of belief, considering concepts such as spiritual shopping, consumerism and pick-and-mix religions. There were some impressive answers showing a great range of knowledge and understanding of this topic. Some students, however, wrote quite one-sidedly on the question, offering no evaluation whatsoever. Many wrote over-long answers, given the marks that were available.

Question 03

The phrase 'spiritual revolution' unfortunately triggered another clutch of basic secularisation responses. It is disappointing that so many students seemed to pay little attention to the precise wording of questions.

More rounded answers provided a consideration of the growth of New Age movements and placed this in a context where the decline of traditional religions, the growth of new religious movements, issues related to secularisation, and changes in the manner and style of beliefs were considered.

It was pleasing to see that many students were aware that 'New Age' covers a range of different movements and not only those revealed by the Kendal project.

Question 04

This was the more popular of the two 33-mark questions in this section. Answers took a number of forms. The most basic juxtaposed Marxist and functionalist perspectives on religion. These were usually explained at a generic level rather than referenced to specific authors. Some provided fuller accounts, adding variously feminist, neo-Marxist and postmodernist perspectives to the debate. In very many answers the wording of the question was ignored; this produced a standard 'sociology of religion from different perspectives' response. Many answers were presented in a timeless vacuum, with no hints of, or reference to, 'today'. Many students continue to misunderstand the concept of fundamentalism.

Better answers came from those students who could combine material from a range of perspectives, referenced where possible, and consider the usefulness of functionalist theories for understanding religion today. At a basic level, students simply needed to ask themselves 'Do the things that functionalists say still work for society today?'

Section B – Global Development

Question 05

This question was answered well by many students. The most common responses referred to improvements in health services, rising economic prosperity, changes in the role of women, and the development of better education services.

Question 06

This question was answered well by many students. This was pleasing as it was the first time this topic had been directly examined. Many students raised issues such as the distinction between new wars and old wars (Kaldor). Some students provided lengthy descriptions of issues linked to wars but did not directly address the question set, ie they failed to consider the impact of war and conflict on development.

Question 07

There were many well-developed responses to this question. The push-pull factors related to urbanisation were considered at some length and many students were able to provide good empirical examples to back up their arguments. This is clearly an area that is well taught in centres and well understood by students.

Question 08

This was the less popular of the two 33-mark questions on global development and many of the answers were disappointing.   Better answers considered factors such as economic development, education, political change, power, patriarchy, and the impact of the growth of transnational corporations. However, many students considered 'gender' to refer only to women and ignored the impact of development on men. It is disappointing that so many students still respond to questions on gender by giving answers that are so narrowly and falsely based.

Section C – Mass Media

Question 09

It was very disappointing to note that students from some centres had clearly not come across the concept of cultural imperialism. As a consequence, many scored zero for this question.

Those students who did know and understand the concept provided a wide range of examples. The most popular of these were the growth of the internet, global advertising or branding, satellite TV, the spread of popular music, and the spread of western fast food, backed by advertising through the media.

These were usually explained reasonably well, though some students tended to expand on the points they had identified rather than explain them.

Question 10

This question was well answered by many students. Many made good use of material from the Item and elsewhere to present a wide-ranging debate. The issues and concepts most often explored were glass ceilings, the nature of patriarchy, organisational constraints, media ownership, advertising, male gaze, and the cult of femininity. A wider range of sources was used than in previous questions on this topic. However, as with responses to Question 08, some students wrote only about women.

Question 11

The answers to this question were surprising. In an era when students may spend up to six hours per day using the new media, it is extraordinary that so few seemed to grasp the impact of those media today. Of those who answered this question, most talked about social networking and, occasionally, referred to the Arab Spring. However, few were able to broaden the debate beyond recounting traditional perspective-based views. A small minority of students attempted to consider the impact of widening internet access, portability of media hardware, the digital divide, popular culture, consumerism, the role of new media in relation to agenda-setting and gate-keeping, shopping online, and so on.

Question 12

Many answers juxtaposed views from a range of theoretical perspectives, including Marxist, neo-Marxist and pluralist. Most simply accepted that the statement in the question was correct and did not seek to challenge it. Where control was discussed, it tended to be in somewhat crude terms, for instance saying that a media owner would simply demand that his views were expressed via his newspaper or TV channel. Few students considered different kinds of control, such as allocative or operational control.

Similarly, few students looked outside the UK for examples to include in the debate; for example Fox News in the USA has been seen over the past few years to apply a right-wing and anti-Obama slant to the news items it broadcasts. The majority of answers read as if the debates around this question had not moved on or changed in nature over the past ten or fifteen years.

Section D – Power and Politics

Question 13

Many students struggled to go much beyond male prejudice in their responses to this question. Better students brought in the notion of voter resistance, the lack of role models, home pressures, and the unattractive pattern of work as reasons why women tend to be under-represented. Some gave reasons that overlapped and so could not score all the marks available.

Question 14

The essence of this question has been examined before in various forms, so it was disappointing to see a lack of knowledge and understanding in many answers. Most students talked at length about voter apathy, usually in an attempt to agree with the quotation. Few challenged the premise of the question and therefore failed to provide any assessment. Similarly, few considered alternatives to voting, such as direct action, pressure group activity, new social movements, and the notion of individualism in modern politics.

Question 15

In questions where a time period is given, such as 'the past 30 years or so', the intention is to help students focus on appropriate sociological knowledge. In this particular question, that focus was rarely adopted. Many students provided political summaries stretching back to the Second World War. Such answers tended to reveal only limited understanding of the changes they recounted.

Very few answers focused on the set question and on the decline in importance of political parties. Many simply recounted changes, such as the growth of the Third Way for Labour. There seems to be a sad lack of understanding about our political structures and institutions. Very few students even acknowledged that we have a multi-party system, so they missed opportunities to discuss nationalism in Scotland and Wales, or the role of parties in Northern Ireland, as well as the discussions on parties represented at Westminster.

Question 16

This question was answered well by some students. Such answers included a good mix of theoretical and empirical material and tied the question in with issues of today. Weaker responses came from those who saw an opportunity simply to recount a series of theoretical perspectives, such as elitism, pluralism, Marxism, and so on, in a fairly timeless description. There were many very lengthy descriptions of lions and foxes and what they do.

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