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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned**.

SOCIOLOGY

GCE Advanced Level and GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

| Paper 9699/01 |
| Essay |

General comments

Once again, the Examiners were impressed by the overall standard of the candidates. Not only do a significant proportion of the entry demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of the relevant topics, they are also increasingly skilled in the areas of analysis and evaluation. It is pleasing to report too that much use is being made of recent contributions to sociological theory, most notably through references to the post-modernist perspective. However, there remains a core of candidates, generally linked to particular Centres, who seek to answer the questions with little or no reference to appropriate sociological concepts and evidence. Such answers often take the form of a 'general knowledge' or journalistic type response and because of this they invariably merit only a few marks at best.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Some rather limited answers offered no more than a few basic observations about Marxist theory. Better responses provided a sound account of the main features of Marxist theory and often supplemented this with well-chosen references to other sociological perspectives, most notably the functionalist. Good answers address the question directly by assessing Marxist theory in relation to modern societies specifically. Social changes in the time since Marx was writing were noted and the discussion then focused on how far these developments can be understood in terms of the basic tenets of Marxist theory. Some candidates made especially good use of post-modernist ideas to provide a critical perspective on classical Marxist theory.

Question 2

This was a popular question that attracted a high standard of response overall. Weaker answers offered a few isolated observations about the positivist and/or interpretivist positions, but failed to address the issues raised by the question analytically. Better answers contrasted the positivist and anti-positivist positions in some detail and also raised pertinent questions about the nature of science and scientific method. Discussion of the role of values in sociology often featured in answers at the top of the mark range. Candidates who questioned whether sociology should seek to emulate the natural sciences also particularly impressed the Examiners.

Question 3

Candidates attempting this question were equally divided between those who provided only a descriptive summary of the main features of participant observation and those who merited more credit because they shaped their material to address the specific wording of the question. At the top of the mark range, the issues of validity, ethic and practical problems in relation to participant observation were debated in depth. Extra sophistication was also demonstrated by candidates who assessed the significance of the distinction between covert and overt observation for the question.

Question 4

Lower in the mark range, answers were often confined to a few disparate points about official statistics with little attempt to assess the usefulness of such data in sociological research. Better answers noted a range of advantages and limitations in using official statistics as a research resource. The more sophisticated answer covered both practical and theoretical issues and developed a well-reasoned evaluation of the desirability or otherwise of using official statistics in sociological research. Use of well chosen examples from sociological studies helped to support the analysis.

Question 5

This was a popular question that attracted some very good answers. Candidates who deployed a wide range of relevant empirical data alongside references to different theoretical contributions gained high marks. Particularly impressive were answers that noted the importance for the question of differentiating between groups of women who may occupy contrasting social positions e.g. middle class and working class women, and women from different ethnic groups. Some candidates also made good use of the post-modernist critique of feminist theory. Weaker answers tended to be descriptive and were often confined to a narrow range of issues or a few limited sources of evidence.

Question 6

Lower in the mark range the answers were restricted to a few basic points about racial discrimination with little or no reference to appropriate sociological explanations. Better answers sought to address the reasons why racial discrimination continues to exist in modern societies. The range of explanations included, for example, cultural/historical factors, the structure of the labour market in some countries, Marxist analysis, the impact of nationalism, and the various debates about the existence of an underclass in modern industrial societies. Candidates who used post-modernist contributions to highlight the limitations in earlier sociological accounts of racial discrimination added a valuable edge to their answers.

> **Paper 9699/02**
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> **Data Response**

General comments

The standard continues to improve as candidates become more skilled in answering structured data response questions. There were fewer cases this session of candidates spending overlong responding to the questions that carry the least marks. Time was used more effectively by devoting most attention to answering the part **(c)** and **(d)** questions. However, there were still a few examples of where the candidates penalised themselves by writing needlessly lengthy answers to the part **(a)** and **(b)** questions and thereby leaving insufficient time to answer fully the part **(c)** and **(d)** questions. **Questions 1** and **3** proved the most popular choices. Candidates generally appeared less well prepared for **Question 3** than for the other questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) Some candidates appeared confused between the meaning of socialising and socialisation. However, most of the answers were accurate and achieved full marks.

(b) This question was well answered. The examples most frequently quoted included references to different dress codes, toys, games, forms of discipline and regulations for girls and boys.

(c) Good answers referred to relevant sociological sources such as G. H. Mead's account of how children learn through play and interaction with others. Weaker answers merely described different context in which socialisation occurs, such as the family, school and through the media.

(d) Answers at the lower end of the mark range were often confined to a few descriptive comments about the concept of socialisation. Better answers examined the concept of socialisation from different theoretical perspectives, most notably the functionalist and the interpretivist. The best answers made an explicit attempt to assess the importance of socialisation in shaping human behaviour by discussing, for example, the cases of so-called feral children and/or by reference to cross-cultural and historical variation in forms of human behaviour.

Question 2

(a)   Reliability in the sociological sense refers to the process of repeating a research procedure with the same results being achieved. About half of the candidates defined the term correctly; the other half defined the term reliability with reference to its sociological meaning specifically.

(b)   This question was well answered, with many references to practical, theoretical and ethical problems associated with laboratory research in the social sciences.

(c)   Good answers often identified links between the use of experiments in sociology and the research aims and procedures advocated by positivists. Weaker answers made just one or two limited observations about why experiments might be used in sociological research, with little or no theoretical insight. A few candidates confused the use of experiments with participant observation.

(d)   Weak answers often went little beyond outlining the basic differences between quantitative and qualitative data. Better answers made appropriate links with the debates between positivists and interpretivists. Candidates who achieved high marks for this question discussed the strengths and limitations of both types of data and reached balanced, well-formulated conclusion in answer to the question.

Question 3

(a)   Almost all of the candidates provided a clear and accurate answer to this question.

(b)   Some candidates misinterpreted the question and answered by distinguishing between acquired and achieved social status. Better answers focused on examples of how a person might attain a higher position in society i.e. through such processes as marriage, educational achievement, entrepreneurial success, etc.

(c)   Good answers covered a range of factors that may inhibit upward social mobility among females. Relevant theoretical contributions to the debate also featured in the better responses to the question. Weaker answers offered only a few general observations about the reasons for sexual inequality and failed to focus on the issue of social mobility specifically.

(d)   Candidates who recognised that the question provided an opportunity to discuss the meritocracy thesis generally achieved high marks. The best answers assessed the idea of meritocracy by referring to relevant empirical evidence and/or contrasting theoretical perspectives. Weak responses to the question tended to rely on a few general observations about social class relations and life chances.

Paper 9699/03

Social Change and Differentiation

General comments

The standard of scripts being offered by candidates continues to show an improvement in Sociological understanding and the application of relevant knowledge to the questions. In the better answers there is evidence both of relevance and evaluation. There is no need to evaluate in part **(a)** of any answer but in order to access the higher bands in part **(b)** this is essential.

Many candidates had a very good level of knowledge but by just raising a few issues, like those of weaknesses of the major theories of Marxism and Functionalism, and some of the issues to do with relevance, validity and reliability they could have significantly improved on their marks.

Much evaluation was implicit and direct reference would improve the mark band into which candidates are placed.

Examiners noted this year that although there are still a worrying number of candidates who commit rubric errors these have decreased in number this year. The practice of answering for example **Question 1 (a)** and **Question 2 (b)** has almost disappeared. Both Centres and candidates are to be congratulated as time management was much better with few candidates exhibiting the symptoms of rushing a third answer or running out of time, however, Centres need to stress with their candidates the need to condense answers to part **(a)** and develop those that are for part **(b)**.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This question was answered by many candidates and it was generally well done. Candidates showed that they had a good understanding of the nature of the family within the context of modern industrial societies.

(a)   Those candidates who understood the concept of the life cycle of the family answered well but many confused it with the life cycle of the individual.

(b)   The best answers to this question explored the existence of nuclear families in several ways, both as a stage within which most will go through, as well as an institution that may/may not exist now or in the past. Some candidate wasted a lot of time by explaining in detail the four stages of the family or with definitions of the family based on Murdock that had little relevance to this question. There was also a tendency to claim that reconstituted families are not nuclear families. A number of candidates used the Nayer as an example to show that nuclear families are not the norm even though the question made specific reference to modern industrial societies.

Question 2

This was one of the most popular questions on the examination paper with many candidates answering well and using a wide range of Sociological evidence in their answers.

(a)   The best answers discussed childhood as a social construction and related that to the concept of status. There were many candidates, however, who showed a lack of understanding of the meaning of status and described the role that children occupy instead. In other cases candidates focused on society rather than the family.

(b)   This question could be interpreted as ideal in relation to 'fit' in modern industrial societies or in terms of an 'ideal' or most desirable institution for individuals to live in. The best answers looked at both possibilities in their answers. There was good use of the work of Talcott Parsons and the Functionalists in many answers.

Section B

Question 3

Many candidates selected this question and showed a good understanding of the Sociological issues involved with it, but they needed to have a clear understanding of the concepts of inequality and educational opportunities in order to do well.

(a)   The best answers to this question discussed issues of educational opportunities and not those of employment. Employment did have relevance but it was not pivotal to the question. Answers would have been improved by the use of specific rather than generalised examples of how opportunities for females have improved. Some candidates discussed how females are achieving in society rather than how the opportunities available to them have changed recently.

(b)   There were some excellent answers to this question that explored a range of inequalities that mainly concentrated on issues relating to class, gender and ethnicity. However, there were some excellent references to religion and disability as well. Some candidates only made use of one inequality, usually class, when the question was clearly asking for at least two. The best answers developed their use of theory well beyond that of the basic Marxism and Functionalism.

Question 4

This was a very popular question with candidates and some good answers were submitted. Again there was a need for candidates to have a firm grasp of concepts in order to do well.

(a)   Good understanding of the Functionalist theory was shown but there was a noticeable lack of reference to talent. Most candidates referred to hard work and ability but few made mention of the talent of the individual be recognised regardless of status.

(b)   A good range of answers were written in relation to this question. Few uncritically accepted the implication of the question and many other factors that influence educational achievement were covered. Only a few candidates evaluated the theories in any depth.

Section C

Question 5

This question was selected by many candidates and most showed a clear understanding of the topic. In general Marxism is well understood.

(a)   Many candidates showed an excellent understanding of the Marxist views of the role of religion in society and the very best answers showed that even within the Marxist perspective this is not always the same view. Some candidates provided weaker answers as they provided explanations about Marx's predictions or described the type of religions to be found in societies rather than describing the role of religion.

(b)   There were some excellent descriptions of secularisation submitted for this question that addressed the question fully by starting with the Marxists view. Some candidates did not mention Marxist views at all and although an analysis of a range of views was appropriate, when a perspective is mentioned in the question it does need to be given some consideration in the answer.

Question 6

A very popular question that was well answered by many candidates.

(a)   Very clear knowledge of the nature of sects was shown in answers to this question. The very best of these used clear typologies by key thinkers such as Wallis. Answers were well referenced with examples but weaker candidates frequently only gave one specific example when the question was asking for at least two.

(b)   Many candidates either accepted the proposition in the question uncritically or conversely rejected it completely. The question to be answered well had to be covered from both aspects as well as come to some assessment of the relationship between them. Few candidates successfully indicated how the relative strengths of new and mainstream religions are to be assessed. A majority of candidates still concentrate on Christianity.

Section D

Question 7

This question was answered by a number of candidates and answers covered the full range of the mark bands.

(a)   The majority of candidates showed an excellent understanding of the difficulties involved with understanding official statistics on crime. Some concentrated on the problems of definition and recording whilst others looked at a range of more subtle reasons such as the power of the elite to hide their crimes.

(b)   The vast majority of candidates showed that they had an excellent understanding of the way in which individuals or groups may get labelled deviant. There was, however, a lack of description of the other theories of deviance and then a judgement as to the relative strengths and limitations of each theory.

Question 8

This was an extremely popular question and there were many very good answers to both parts of the question.

(a) Many candidates were able to gain the maximum of marks to this question by giving a clear description of the differences between biological and sociological theories. Namely that one offers explanations by looking at the social processes in society whilst the other looks at genetics. There were many candidates who did not include any reference to sociological explanations at all and instead compared biological to psychological explanations.

(b) Community in relation to this question could be interpreted to mean either the place in which individuals live or the groups with which they associate. The majority of candidates took the later proposition with a few looking at both.

Section E

Question 9

Very few candidates answered this question and of those who did there were few successful answers.

Question 10

Almost no candidates opted to answer this question amongst those that did many only answered one part of the question.

(a) Of the few answers to this question most wrote about alienation and not anomie.

Section F

Question 11

Questions on the mass media are becoming more popular and this question was answered by some.

(a) A good understanding of the role of agenda setters was displayed and the best candidates linked their answers to an understanding of the role of agenda setters in relation to power.

(b) Some candidates interpreted this question as meaning that the mass media act in the role of a guard dog protecting the interests of the state rather than the media acting as a check on the actions of the state on behalf of those outside of state power. Both interpretations were valid but the latter was easier to support with sociological evidence.

Question 12

Of the two mass media questions this was the most popular and was generally well answered.

(a) There were many excellent examples and explanations to this question about the way in which the mass media represent minority groups. Although there was no necessity to focus on the disabled many candidates did and offered many worthwhile examples such as being portrayed as objects of pity. However, some candidates chose to explain the way in which females are portrayed and this is inappropriate as they make up over 50% of most societies.

(b) A detailed understanding of the Hypodermic Syringe Model was offered and the more informed candidates were also able to evaluate it well in comparison to other explanations as to the way in which the mass media effects its audience.