A LEVEL

Examiners' report

SOCIOLOGY

H580

For first teaching in 2015

H580/02 Summer 2023 series

Contents

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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Paper 2 series overview

This year the paper was differentiated effectively with a wide range of responses. The majority of candidates attempted all set questions on the paper.

It was pleasing to see candidates had scored highly on this paper, suggesting that the paper allowed the best candidates to use their knowledge and skills to the full. There were a minority of candidates who misinterpreted questions or aspects of questions, but in general the questions seemed accessible to most candidates who had prepared for the paper.

Time was effectively managed between the demands of the questions. There was a mixed response between candidates who answered Section A first and candidates who chose Section B. Candidates who chose the latter were more likely to miss out one of the short response questions from Section A.

There was a tendency to provide extended responses to Question 1 and Question 2, with these often being the same length as Question 3 which can take up valuable time from the higher tariff questions.

Assessment for learning

Use qualitative and quantitative source material as starters within lessons to practice timed responses for Question 1 and Question 2. Model responses could also be used as starters for candidates to mark to illustrate the expectations for these questions.

Some candidates did not number questions or clearly label additional answer booklets. In addition, handwriting can at times be difficult to read and ascertain what the candidate has written. There were a high number of word-processed submissions this year and should be a consideration for candidates where handwriting impacts on the examiners ability to read what they are trying to say. Paragraphing can also be a strength. Candidates who used connectives and separate paragraphs to explain each knowledge point are more likely to fully develop an idea. Candidates who write in one continual chunk, are more likely to jump between ideas. These ideas are more likely to be undeveloped due to switching between knowledge points.

Assessment for learning

Candidates should practice writing individual paragraphs to embed good practice. For example, knowledge point, sociological evidence, explanation, link to the source/question.

Standalone paragraphs could be used as starters to recap previous lessons, to show progression and learning. If used at the start and end of a lesson, where the starter is then reflected on as a plenary or just as a plenary to illustrate the overall learning from the lesson.

During reflection points, ask candidates to review their work, where could they add a connective to clearly identify AO1 and AO3 knowledge points or identify where should they have started a new paragraph.

For Question's 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6 in order to gain the highest mark bands, candidates needed to include sociological evidence and to discuss them in depth. Sociological evidence can include studies, theories, methodological perspectives, key concepts, and statistics. When annotating responses, examiners will identify each knowledge point, annotate evidence, and then judge if it is undeveloped, underdeveloped or developed. This provides guidance as to where in the mark scheme the response lies. For example, in Question 4, if a candidate states that qualitative methods are high in validity, this would be undeveloped, as it is a correct statement, but with no explanation.

Question Structure

To get the highest mark in the essay questions, candidates should be aiming for the following range and depth:

Question 3: two fully developed points of knowledge (dependent on the question this could be two strengths, two weaknesses or one of each), reference to the source needs to be made for each knowledge point.

Question 4: four fully developed points of knowledge, of these two need to be strengths and two need to be weaknesses of the methodological approach. Again, each knowledge point should be supported by using the source.

Question 5: four fully developed points of knowledge, these should be clearly linked to the question, from at least two different areas for example work and employment and education.

Question 6: four fully developed points of knowledge and four fully developed points of evaluation.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- demonstrated consistent and accurate use of sociological evidence. - demonstrated frequent, explicit and engaged use of source material (Section A) - clearly structured responses, using connectives and paragraphs. - detailed explanations of sociological evidence focused on the specifics of the question.	- demonstrated no or inaccurate use of sociological evidence. - did not read the questions carefully. - used the wrong source, not referring to the source or continually copying out the title of the source for Section A.

Section A overview

This section contains four compulsory questions which refer to either Source A or Source B. In Question 3 and Question 4, to reach the higher mark bands, candidates were expected to use methodological evidence and/or perspectives such as validity and reliability. As discussed in previous reports, there is no requirement to refer to alternative methodologies or sociological studies.

Question 1

1   Using data from Source A, summarise **two** patterns or trends in the gender pay gap in the UK workforce.   **[4]**

The majority of candidates were able to identify trends in the form of changes in the gender pay gap in specific occupational groups between 2018 and 2019 or patterns by comparing groups. For example, in noting that the pay gap was larger in some groups than others or that it had reduced in most groups but had increased in two. To gain full marks, candidates needed to use accurate data from the source to illustrate their chosen pattern or trends. Some candidates did not do this.

Common errors tended to be confusion between increase or decrease of the pay gap or simply reading data incorrectly from the table. Some candidates made statements such as the pay gap is widest in male dominated occupations without specifying what these occupations were. Candidates also referred to the hourly earnings as illustrating the difference between men and women, which was inaccurate as this was an average of earnings for both men and women so didn't respond to the question.

To gain full marks, candidates needed to identify two patterns or trends and then support them with accurate data from the source, where statistics/data is explicitly shown. Examiners will not accept vague references or inaccurate percentages.

Key point call out

This question should take approximately five minutes to respond to and candidates can gain full marks through using the source material only.
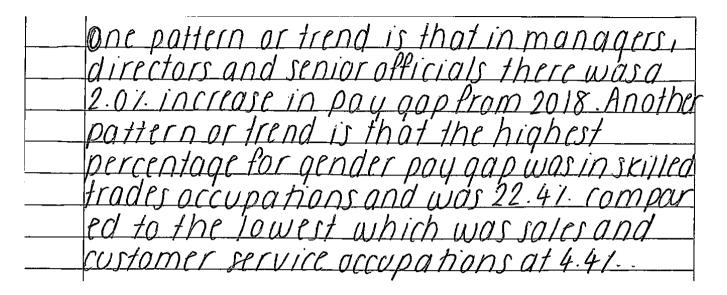
There is no requirement to offer sociological evidence and/or reasons such as why the gender pay gap is increasing or decreasing.

Assessment for learning

As a starter task to introduce a topic or sociological study, use a short extract or statistics and ask candidates to identify two patterns or trends. This will familiarise the candidate with the question type while also getting candidates to think about the upcoming topic. Candidates could then peer mark these or could return to these at the end of the lesson for reflective practice to improve their response.

Exemplar 1

> One pattern or trend is that in managers, directors and senior officials there was a 2.0% increase in pay gap from 2018. Another pattern or trend is that the highest percentage for gender pay gap was in skilled trades occupations and was 22.4% compared to the lowest which was sales and customer service occupations at 4.4%.

Exemplar 1 demonstrates one pattern and one trend with reference to accurate data from the source for both ideas. Excellent structure, with no surplus material included, a very clear full mark response.

Question 2

2   With reference to **Source B**, explain **two** reasons why reflexivity might be important to sociologists in their research.   **[6]**

The majority of candidates were able to identify two reasons why reflexivity might be important in their research. For AO1, candidates needed to suggest two reasons and a clear definition was provided in the source. A range of reasons were identified such as bias/showing awareness of bias, to help make improvements to the methods used/identify weaknesses in the methodology and to help other researchers in the future. Some candidates, however, did not understand the meaning of reflexivity and gave reasons why it was important to achieve validity, rapport etc without linking this to reflexivity.

For AO2, a number of candidates did not achieve full marks as they did not use the source to support their responses. Candidates either copied parts of the question or the title of the source rather than engaging with the material itself. Responses which achieved high marks, included talking about how Poulton adapted her methodology to fit in with the hyper-masculine hooligan subculture, how she adapted her presentation of self by avoiding dressing too provocatively and how she used her research diary to continually evaluate her methods and conclusions during the research.

Assessment for learning

Using previous source material, candidates could practice skim reading. Use different coloured highlighters or underlining to identify key concepts and methods used in the source.

Question 3

3   With reference to **Source A**, explain **two** limitations of using quantitative data on the UK gender pay gap for measuring the extent of progress towards gender equality.   **[10]**

The majority of candidates were able to identify two limitations of the use of quantitative data. The most common responses focused on interpretivism, validity and the lack of rapport and verstehen. Candidates were able to explain these concepts, but some candidates were unable to fully develop them or simply repeated previous points. Good responses often considered what else sociologists might wish to study in order to assess progress towards gender inequality, for example, more qualitative data on subjective feelings of workers about the gender pay gap and gender inequality more generally or data on other aspects of gender inequality i.e., the proportion of women in higher level jobs, evidence about discrimination in the workplace and evidence about women's domestic responsibilities.

For AO2, there were candidates still not using the source or simply repeating aspects of the question which does not gain marks. There were also candidates who paid lip service to the source such as lifting statistics, but to gain higher marks, these needed to be engaged with and illustrated on how this demonstrates the limitation being discussed.

For AO3, candidates needed to develop sociological evidence. Concepts need to be explained and demonstrate why it lacks validity or why rapport would have been beneficial to develop.

A minority of candidates are still addressing strengths when the question is only asking for limitations. It is important to read the requirements of the question carefully to prevent wasting time.

Misconception

?   A number of candidates chose to spend time describing quantitative methods/data before answering the question. No marks were given for this as it is not a requirement of the question.

In addition, there are still candidates who noted strengths of quantitative data. Again, this is not a requirement of the question. It is important to read questions carefully to make sure that time is spent focusing on the specifics of the question rather than on information that cannot gain marks.

Exemplar 2

One limitation of using quantitative data is that it lacks meaning. Quantitative data such as that presented in source A tell us that the gender pay gap has increased by 2% for senior officials and by 0.1% for leisure. These statistics do not tell us why there has been an increase, what caused it or attitudes towards it. Interpretivists would not like the use of quantitative data as they cannot establish verstehen and make no subjective interpretations about individual experiences meaning that as they could using qualitative data such as unstructured interviews. Therefore, as they lack meaningful rich data, quantitative measures can be seen to lack validity.

In exemplar 2, we can see that the candidate has clearly identified the limitation as a lack of meaning, and then supported this with accurate statistics from the source. They engaged with the source by stating that there is no reason as to why there has been an increase. The limitation is then developed by illustrating there is a lack of verstehen and validity.

Question 4*

4* Using **Source B** and your wider sociological knowledge, explain and evaluate the use of qualitative methods for researching football hooliganism. **[25]**

This question was reasonably well answered by the majority of candidates. The best responses showed range (at least two strengths and two weaknesses of the use of qualitative methods for researching football hooliganism) and depth (by showing clear understanding of theories and concepts in relation to each point). There were candidates who identified far more points than needed and therefore sacrificed the level or development of marks required for top level responses.

Some candidates seemed to have felt they had to cover theoretical, practical and ethical issues in their response. This is not required by the question or the mark scheme. Discussions of practical issues often lacked theoretical or conceptual aspects i.e. simply stating that 'qualitative methods are time consuming'. Better responses linked practical issues to concepts i.e. pointing out that because participant observation and in depth interviews take a long time, sample sizes are small and therefore there may be issues of representativeness and generalisability.

Similarly, ethics was often only discussed in simplistic terms. For example, Poulton might have come to harm at the hands of the hooligans. Better responses discussed concepts like 'informed consent' and 'confidentiality' and how these might be relevant to the study.

Popular points which were identified in terms of strengths tended to centre on interpretivist theory and how such methods might produce more valid responses or achieve verstehen. Candidates also discussed how Poulton was able to achieve rapport and thus gain trust to understand the meanings of the hooligan subculture. A few candidates argued that although the interviews only involved two gatekeepers, because these were 'top boys' with years of involvement in the subculture, they might still provide a picture of hooliganism which was representative in the sense it could be generalised to the wider hooligan culture.

Good responses on weaknesses tended to draw on positivist theory and considered lack of representativeness because most data came from Chris and Dave from the source who were also semi-retired, so possibly offered a narrow and dated picture. There was also discussion of the subjective nature of such research. For example, the possibility of Poulton 'going native' and the fact that the research might be unreliable as it offered a personal interpretation of the field by Poulton, a female researcher, which might not be replicated by different sociologists studying this topic. Some candidates also discussed the problems created by lack of quantitative data. For example, not being able to measure trends over time in hooliganism, the number of incidents or consider patterns, the make-up of the hooligan subculture in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, age or other characteristics.

Responses varied in terms of how successfully candidates applied the source material to support their points. Some candidates with good responses made little or no explicit reference to the source but there were also some really effective responses where candidates consistently referred to the source in relation to every point. Where candidates did use source material, some only paid lip service. For example, quoting that Poulton had difficulties as a woman in a hyper-masculine field without explaining what the difficulties were or how successful or otherwise, she was in overcoming these.

Misconception
? Candidates do not need to refer to alternative sociological studies to develop methodological analysis.

Key point call out
Candidates should focus on two strengths and two weaknesses. Clearly signpost a new knowledge point, use a new paragraph for each strength and weakness. Engage with the source, make sure it is relevant and supports the knowledge point being discussed, explain how it supports the strength or weakness being discussed.

Section B overview

This section has two compulsory questions. Both required candidates to use a wide range of sociological evidence which needs to be fully developed in order to achieve Level 4. On the whole, candidates were able to access both of these questions and to include sociological evidence.

The majority of candidates seemed to understand the requirements for evaluation in the 20- and 40-mark essays, suggesting that they were clear on the appropriate question technique. There were a full range of responses, where candidates gave less successful responses, illustrating difficulty in understanding the question and some candidates gave more successful responses, which scored very highly.

Question 5*

5*   Outline ways in which ethnic inequalities still exist in the UK today.   **[20]**

To achieve Level 4 in this question, candidates needed to include four fully developed points. The most common ways of approach to this were to ethnic inequalities in a range of social areas such as education, work, employment, and health.

Candidates seemed to have taken on board the need to support points on this question with a range of sociological evidence with fewer poorly informed or wholly non-sociological responses. The best responses tended to clearly identify four aspects of ethnic inequalities in the UK today and then offered a developed paragraph of evidence for each one. The best responses tended to use accurate statistics, findings of sociological studies or reports by government bodies of voluntary organisations.

Some candidates also applied theoretical and conceptual approaches which tended to be most successful when they were supported with empirical data. For example, the concrete ceiling was a popular concept (although some candidates did not appreciate that it was applied to BAME women specifically), but the better developed responses then offered evidence that there was a concrete ceiling i.e. studies of discrimination in promotion or evidence of under-representation of BAME women in top jobs. The dual labour market was also widely discussed but often in terms of just a fairly basic description of the primary and secondary labour markets. Better responses considered why minorities might be concentrated in the secondary labour market and evidence that certain groups were over-represented in lower paid, more insecure or unskilled work.

A common theme to some responses was a tendency to generalise about all ethnic minorities without offering specific data about different groups or showing awareness of diversity between minority groups. This was apparent in discussions of education where some candidates asserted that ethnic minorities were disadvantaged in education without showing awareness that groups such as Indians and Chinese have higher levels of attainment and lower rates of exclusion than whites. There was also confusion between income and wealth with some candidates quoting figures relating to average wealth/assets of different ethnic groups as being their average annual income.

Exemplar 3

Another area of ethnic minority disadvantage is in crime and youth subcultures. Alexander, in her work 'the myth of the Asian gang', argues that

young Asian men are likely to be seen as part of a gang, even when they do little to justify this label. She argues that young Asian men are frequently treated with suspicion due to racist stereotypes such as these. Hall et al, in 'policing the crisis', argue that young black men are often scapegoated and marginalised as a means of distraction from society's real issues. For example, a moral panic around black 'mugging' occurred in the 80s, despite no evidence that this crime was new or increasing, causing black men to also be viewed with suspicion by the public, police and media. Alexander and Hall et al. therefore demonstrate that ethnic minorities face disadvantage in terms of crime and youth subcultures: they are more likely to be seen as part of a gang due to racist stereotypes, and are often scapegoated as criminals to cover up for the flawed capitalist system.

In exemplar 3, the candidate has identified the link between ethnicity and age within crime and youth subcultures. They identify two studies which they explain in depth to explicitly support their idea and response the question. This is a fully developed idea.

Question 6*

6*   Assess the sociological view that social inequalities are functional for society.   **[40]**

In this question, candidates needed four fully developed points for each side of the debate.

This was a very broad question which allowed candidates to apply their knowledge to all four types of inequality covered in the specification. Perhaps because of this, even weaker responses tended to demonstrate some relevant sociological knowledge. However, some well-prepared candidates felt a need to cram in every piece of knowledge they had. This meant that their responses were less developed in terms of depth or involved juxtaposition of different perspectives without explaining their relevance to the question, or being explicitly used to evaluate the debate.

The best responses tended to identify four ways in which social inequalities might be seen as functional, often presenting a paragraph of evidence about class, gender, ethnic and age inequalities and then countered these with four paragraphs of evaluation. The best examples of evaluation made explicit critical points against the view rather than merely juxtaposing alternative sociological perspectives.

The majority of candidates had some understanding of functionalist approaches, but these tended to be differentiated in terms of the depth of coverage and the extent to which concepts and supportive evidence was used. For example, Davis and Moore's study was widely cited with weaker responses simply stating that social stratification ensures the best people get the most important jobs. More developed responses tended to use concepts such as 'effective role allocation', 'functional uniqueness' and 'dependency of positions'. Some candidates also used examples to illustrate their arguments. New Right ideas were also widely used in support of the view with writers such as Murray, Saunders and Schlafly cited.

In evaluation, a very wide range of material was employed, although understanding of some perspectives was underdeveloped. For example, Marxism was widely used to evaluate the view but in relation to class many candidates tended to simply focus on the idea that the bourgeoisie exploited the proletariat, so class inequality was not functional for everyone. Better responses considered concepts such as appropriation of surplus value, alienation, ideological state apparatuses and false class consciousness to highlight the way in which capitalism might be seen as dysfunctional. Some candidates also attacked the idea of meritocracy using Bowles and Gintis's idea that it was a myth or Bourdieu's idea that inequalities in relation to cultural, social and economic capital meant that social classes were reproduced in a way that was far from meritocratic. Weberian approaches were also widely discussed but often in a simplistic way i.e. that people were disadvantaged by status and power as well as social class. A few good responses were seen discussing issues such as social closure and strategies used by privileged groups to defend their privileges, drawing on writers such as Parkin or studies of social mobility.

Feminism was generally better understood with the majority of candidates able to cite evidence that gender inequality might not be functional for women. Good responses drew on a range of studies and different feminist approaches and were able to cite specific evidence i.e. workplace inequalities, domestic labour and family roles and domestic violence and harassment.

There were some good discussions of age inequality, for example citing disengagement theory for the view and using Weberian, Marxist and feminist approaches to critique. Candidates also used Patterson's host immigrant model to support the view in relation to ethnic inequalities and evaluated with Marxism (i.e. minorities simply exploited as a reserve army of labour) and Weberian theory (i.e. minorities trapped in the secondary labour market due to discrimination). Although the reserve army of labour and dual labour market were used as concepts, many candidates did not seem to really understand them and used them almost interchangeably to suggest a general sense that minorities were disadvantaged in relation to the labour market.

Other misunderstandings seemed to arise from candidates misinterpreting material or possibly using inaccurate sources. For example, the majority of candidates cited Young as a functionalist who approved of meritocracy when in fact, he wrote a book satirising it. Durkheim was also crudely presented as a functionalist who approved of social inequality when his work is far more nuanced, linking the rise of the division of labour to the way modern societies are stratified. He argued that it would only be functional if positions were based on merit and there was a shared sense of interdependence based on organic solidarity. Some candidates also applied material on the wrong side of the argument i.e. Murray was sometimes seen as criticising social inequality because of the dysfunctional nature of the underclass when he was actually criticising attempts to reduce social inequality through state welfare programmes. There were candidates who also suggested that Marx thought class inequality was functional because it served the needs of the capitalist class without recognising that for the proletarian majority it was far from functional. Similarly, the dual labour market was seen by some as functional to the working of capitalism without acknowledging that groups such as ethnic minorities or women might find the system highly dysfunctional.

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