

**Sociology**

Advanced GCE A2 7878

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3878

**Report on the Units**

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**June 2006**

**3878/7878/MS/R/06**

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## CONTENTS

### Advanced GCE Sociology (7878)

### Advanced Subsidiary GCE Sociology (3878)

#### REPORT ON THE UNITS

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
*	Chief Examiner Introduction	5
2532	The Individual and Society	6
2533	Culture and Socialisation	8
2534	Sociological Research Skills	17
2535	Research Report	21
2536	Power and Control	24
2537	Applied Sociological Research Skills	29
2538	Personal Study	32
2539	Social Inequality and Difference	37
*	Grade Thresholds	40



## **Chief Examiner's Report**

In A and AS Level Sociology candidates performed in a similar way to previous sessions, with standards in each unit showing little change from the summer 2004 session. There follows a report on each unit from this session, with some suggested teaching tips for teachers focussing particularly on the skills needed to achieve success in this specification. Teachers are encouraged to read the relevant sections and to attend INSET courses during the autumn term to gain further feedback should they require it.

## 2532 - The Individual and Society

Candidate performance on this unit was comparable with previous sessions. Question 2 was significantly more popular than question 1 both between and within centres. There was a noticeable improvement in the quality of responses to part (c) questions, where candidates are increasingly aware that they need to use sociological evidence in their answers and that they need to evaluate.

- 1 (a) Most candidates could identify two factors which will shape identity in 2020 from item A. Any of the following were permissible responses: family, friends, globalisation, weakening knowledge of British history or the national cultures being reduced. The majority of responses cited family and friends, some of them amalgamating the two in line with the phrasing in the item. A number of responses made no attempt to explain the factors and those who cited family and friends together often struggled to give separate explanations. This was not a problem so long as candidates had identified a second factor and explained it separately, which some did but others failed to do.
- (b) This question posed problems for some candidates who did not appear to understand the concept of global culture. The strongest responses discussed concepts such as: cultural homogeneity, Americanisation and hybridisation in their answers. Most responses referred to shared food, clothing and high street fashion or cultural consumption patterns through the mediums such as digital television or trans-national companies such as Disney. Where these responses used relevant contemporary examples they were rewarded fully. A number of responses however failed to provide an answer to this question or answered wholly inaccurately on national cultures.
- (c) This question was well answered with candidates taking the opportunity to display their knowledge of agencies of socialisation. Most responses answered with reference to primary and secondary socialisation, using specific examples from studies or contemporary examples which became the differentiating factor. Those who discussed the family tended to relate this well, either explicitly or implicitly, to norms and values, which meant that their interpretation and application marks improved. A number of responses used the opportunity to discuss cultural differences through family socialisation patterns, some using Ballard and Butler well. Unsurprisingly many referred to Oakley's work on gender role socialisation and related this to different gender norms. Candidates also used the media, religion and education well. The strongest responses used concepts and studies in their answers, probably from their 2533 topic. The skill of evaluation continues to improve on this paper with an increasing number of candidates able to offer commentary on the strength of different agents of socialisation and the power that individuals have to reject socialisation. There is a less well defined centre effect with evaluation than in the past. It appears as though candidates either know and remember how to evaluate or they don't.
- (d) This question produced some outstanding answers and some very weak attempts. The strongest responses understood how British identity may be different to English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish identity and related part of their answer to the process of devolution. Multiculturalism figured highly in responses although at times candidates found it difficult to relate this to a weakening identity. Most candidates who understood the debate related contemporary examples such the monarchy, patriotism, BNP, sporting events and food to the question with varying degrees of sophistication and sociological awareness. The strongest answers understood the debate surrounding the changing British identity and used relevant studies in support of their answer. Studies such as Schudson and Curtice and Heath appeared most often. Very few candidates used theory in their answer this did not preclude them from scoring high marks.

- 2 (a) All candidates could identify two stereotypical features of femininity from item, B. The most popular responses focussed on women being desirable to men, waiting for a man, physical attributes such as blonde hair or their nurturing role. The differentiating factor on this question was the quality and existence of two different explanations. Some responses which identified 2 closely related factors such as 'blonde hair' and 'being heavily made up', failed to provide different explanations for the features. In this particular item the quantity of different legitimate factors was vast and if this is the case in future examinations candidates would be well advised to select features that are significantly different from each other to aid the clarity of their explanations.
- (b) This question posed few problems for candidates. Most could correctly identify two features of traditional masculinity, and the differentiating factor came from the quality of the knowledge and understanding used in their answers. The strongest responses referred to features of hegemonic masculinity and often used Connell's work. Some made effective use of Gilmour and discussed traditional masculinity as being 'providers, protectors and impregnators'. The strongest of these then differentiated between the male role in providing, using the concept of breadwinner and the male role in protecting and discussed physical strength. Some candidates misread or misinterpreted the question and provided features of new masculinities such as the new lad, new man or metrosexual man. It was evident from responses to this question that most candidates can engage with different types of masculine identities and seem at ease discussing them.
- (c) The majority of candidates used Oakley's work on gender role socialisation to answer this question. Almost all responses could identify two ways in which the family influenced gender although only the strongest answers could relate this to the gender identities. The weakest answers wrote about gender specific toys and colour coded clothing, briefly and without evidence. Mid range answers could provide some evidence in their answers often using Oakley's manipulation or canalisation or Walum's research. The strongest of these answers then related their answer to the influence that the family had on gender identities, discussing issues such as how girls are perceived by others or how they may perceive themselves in light of gender role socialisation through the family. Some candidates used Francis' research on gender roles in primary schools, with less success as they struggled to relate the study to the influence of the family. The strongest answers were conceptually confident. Evaluation on this question came largely through discussing the relative influence of secondary socialisation to influence gender identities as people get older, particularly the role played by the media.
- (d) There were some excellent sociologically aware responses to this question, which focussed wholly on male and female social roles. Some of these approached the question through areas of social life where different roles were evident; workplace, home, religion and school most notably. This enabled them to then consider the different roles taken and to use concepts as necessary such as: segregated workplaces, glass ceiling, symmetrical families, patriarchy, hidden curriculum. Other responses approached the question by focussing on the roles that men and women hold in society, such as women are the homemakers and men the breadwinners, men in positions of dominance, women as subservient through reference to workplace or religious organisations. As long as the focus was on the different roles of men and women these responses tended to score highly. Many responses however wrote answers which neglected roles and focussed on the social behaviour of men and women. These answers often reverted to anecdotal evidence that men drink beer and women don't, clearly responses at this level were deemed limited. Evaluation in this question came from a discussion of either men and women becoming increasingly similar in their roles or through candidates engaging with the issue of 'still' in the question and evaluating the issue of changing roles.

## **2533/01 - Culture and Socialisation**

### **General Comments**

The overall standard of responses for this session was good with evidence that many candidates were well prepared in terms of knowledge and understanding of relevant studies, sociological concepts, statistical evidence and theory. It was also noticeable, however, that there were a number of centres almost all of whose candidates produced very weak answers, lacking in any sound sociological material.

The Family continues to be the most popular option, followed by Mass Media, Religion and Youth and Culture. An overwhelming majority of candidates chose to answer both Family questions. Only a small number of candidates opted for Religion and Youth and Culture. There were a few rubric errors, the most common being that candidates attempted to answer one question, with even fewer answering four questions. Where four questions were attempted, answers tended to be brief and lacked evidence whereas answers to only one question were typically very long and detailed. Generally candidates used their time appropriately, producing approximately three quarters of a side of A4 for part (a) and two sides for part (b). Few appeared to run out of time on the second part (b) question.

It was noticeable that a significant number of candidates performed quite poorly on part (a) questions, including some who had produced quite strong part (b) answers and this seemed due, in part, to poor exam technique. The most common errors were:

- Candidates identifying more than two points
- Candidates identifying two points which overlap to such a degree that they can only be treated as one point.
- Candidates failing to fully explain their two points often simply identifying and giving a brief explanation.
- Candidates failing to make use of sociological theories, concepts, studies and/or statistics to develop their answer and demonstrate sociological knowledge and understanding
- Candidates using time inappropriately on material not required by the question, for example, by including criticisms or evidence against their explanations.

### **Teacher's Tip:**

To achieve top band marks for part (a) questions, points need to be identified and then explained using relevant sociological evidence including concepts, studies, theory and / or statistics. In part (a) questions, candidates should be encouraged to identify two clear and distinct factors with explanations that do not overlap. Using a separate paragraph for each point identified and explained is a useful way for candidates to be clear that they have offered two different points.



On part b questions weaker answers tended to suffer from the following problems:

- Candidates had insufficient sociological knowledge and responses were mainly anecdotal or drawn from common sense. Better candidates made use of sociological theories, concepts and or research.
- Some candidates produced answers which were well informed sociologically but using material which was of only marginal relevance to the question on the paper.
- Candidates failed to interpret and analyse sociological data, for example statistics and findings of sociological studies or even examples from current events or broader social trends.
- Candidates produced one-sided answers that only considered evidence agreeing or disagreeing with the view.
- Candidates produced balanced answers but which simply juxtaposed arguments or evidence with little explicit evaluation. Better candidates offered critical comments, weighed up arguments and evidence and drew a reasoned conclusion about the view.
- A number of candidates wrote part (b) answers that were little longer or even shorter than their part (a) answers. Candidates should be aware that part (b) requires a response that is at least twice as long as part (a) reflecting the marks allocated.

Overall, most candidates were able to gain a reasonable number of marks for evaluation in part (b) and although this skill continues to be a testing area for candidates, most made some attempt to refer to counter arguments. A large number of candidates evaluate via juxtaposing arguments and theories without any exploration of strengths and weaknesses of evidence. A sustained evaluative approach throughout the answer should be aimed for, with candidates adopting an evaluative tone from their introductory paragraph onwards. Some candidates produced responses that only gained marks for evaluation in the concluding sentences whilst others evaluated only one side of the view.

**Teacher's Tip:**

A sustained evaluative approach can be demonstrated by candidates writing an evaluative introduction, making some pertinent evaluative points about studies, theories and ideas, and summarising the different views in relation to the question. The candidate should aim to evaluate specific sociological arguments from more than one side of the view, based on the available evidence, methods and explanations. Candidates could be encouraged to use key evaluative terms that signal that they are evaluating the evidence or the argument at that point e.g. 'however', 'on the other hand', 'conversely', 'on the contrary', 'in contrast'.

The skill of interpretation and analysis appeared challenging to a number of candidates, some of whom were able to produce responses with sound knowledge and understanding of concepts, studies etc. but who were unable to apply this effectively to engage with the arguments involved. Some simply listed evidence and made no attempt to apply it to the question.

**Teacher's Tip:**

To achieve the highest marks in the skill of interpretation and analysis candidates need to select and analyse different types of data including studies, theory, sociology concepts and / or statistical evidence on various sides of the argument. Candidates should aim to identify the most relevant data and then show how this relates to the question, highlighting patterns and trends, supported with evidence where appropriate.

Overall, candidates fulfilled the requirements in terms of quality of written communication, producing work written in continuous prose and with clarity of expression, although there were a noticeable number of candidates with significant spelling, punctuation and grammar errors.

## **Comments on Individual Questions**

### **OPTION 1: THE FAMILY**

- 1) (a) This question was not generally well answered. Some candidates failed to specify any ethnic groups in their answer and talked in vague terms about family life in ethnic minorities. Others tended to focus on issues that were more marginal to family life e.g. dress, religious customs and food. Some candidates also focused only on individual ethnic groups and failed to make explicit comparison with other ethnic groups to show how family life differed according to ethnicity. Better answers considered issues such as the role of extended family, attitudes to marriage, divorce and cohabitation, arranged versus love marriages, the extent of single parent families and roles of men and women. Only a minority of candidates were able to clearly identify and explain two ways in depth and make use of sociological research or statistical evidence to back up their answers. A significant number of candidates were only awarded marks within the level 2 band.
- (b) This question was generally quite well answered. Most candidates identified the traditional family as being nuclear and patriarchal, though a few candidates also considered the decline of the traditional extended family. Many candidates correctly identified the view as associated with New Right thinkers and some were able to cite examples e.g. Patricia Morgan, Melanie Phillips, Charles Murray and John Redwood. Most candidates were able to cite at least some trends which supported the view, e.g. growth of alternatives to the nuclear family including same sex, single parents and reconstituted families, decline in marriage rates, increase in divorce and change in traditional gender roles. Candidates were differentiated in terms of the range of evidence considered and the depth and detail of responses. Weaker candidates tended to refer to a few generalised trends while the best were able to cite statistical evidence and sociological studies to support arguments on a range of issues. Many candidates produced one-sided answers and struggled to find arguments against. Better candidates drew on the work of writers such as Chester and pointed to the persistence of traditional elements in newer family forms as well as the functional importance of the traditional family according to writers such as Parsons. Some candidates also pointed to continuing patriarchal elements in family life drawing on feminist theories. A few candidates' answers were well informed but very narrow, for example focusing only on the extent to which traditional patriarchal elements of family life had disappeared. A noticeable number of candidates demonstrated sound knowledge and understanding but were weak on developing supporting evidence for the skill of interpretation and analysis. Some candidates lost focus on the question and were side-tracked into discussing the pros and cons of traditional family forms.

(a) Most candidates were able to identify two reasons but weaker answers often lacked more than brief explanation. Better candidates made use of sociological studies e.g. Sharpe on girls' attitudes and aspirations, Young and Willmott on symmetrical family roles and Connell on new masculinities. Some candidates also drew on statistical evidence e.g. about the changing nature of the workforce. Candidates considered a range of issues including:

- Changing aspirations of women
- Influence of feminism
- Men sharing roles in the family more
- Changes in the workforce e.g. growth of service sector and flexible work
- Consumerism and demand for higher living standards
- Government policies e.g. New Deal and family tax credits
- Delay in child bearing and smaller families
- Better access to childcare

A few candidates discussed why some couples were remaining childless and adopting dual careers but this was not really relevant, as these would not be regarded as families. Some candidates misunderstood the question and answered it in terms of dual-carer or dual burden.

(b) This question produced a broad range of responses with some very good answers showing a clear understanding of the question. Weaker responses tended to be largely anecdotal and often wholly one sided. Some candidates also focused on a narrow range of issues for example domestic violence, women in employment or changing masculinities. Better answers covered a broader range of issues including not only those above but also the division of domestic labour, childcare, decision-making, personal finances and emotion work. The best answers were well informed in terms of research on these areas drawing on studies such as Beck, Burghes, Young and Willmott on the symmetrical family, Connell's work on new masculinities, British Social Attitudes Surveys, evidence of women's participation in paid work, easier access to divorce and growth of single parenthood and Gershuny's concept of lagged adaptation. Most candidates considered both sides of the argument to some extent with better candidates referring to, Oakley, Edgell, Pahl and evidence drawn from 'the dark side' of family life issues. Candidates very rarely differentiated between feminist approaches. Some candidates made reference to Functionalism and Parsons' work but seemed uncertain about how it related to the debate. Many candidates simply juxtaposed arguments but better candidates used material from one side of the debate to criticise the other. A surprising number of candidates did not understand the meaning of the term 'patriarchal' and wrote about issues surrounding patriotism, for which they generally received no marks at all. Others produced vague responses centred around the family continuing in importance.

**OPTION 2: MASS MEDIA**

- 3 (a) This question produced a good range of responses although there were a noticeable number of wholly anecdotal answers. Some candidates simply talked about bias in the media against ethnic minorities generally without discussing specific examples of ethnic stereotyping. Most candidates were able to at least identify ethnic stereotypes. The most commonly cited were Afro-Caribbeans as criminal/ violent, Muslims as terrorists, Asians as very traditional e.g. arranged marriages and asylum seekers as welfare scroungers. Better candidates referred to studies such as Van Dijk and Hall. Some candidates attempted to discuss positive stereotypes but these were often more focused on representations of ethnic minorities rather than stereotypes. A number of candidates failed to develop their answer in terms of the media's role in creating stereotypes.
- (b) This question was generally quite well answered. Weaker candidates tended to have little knowledge of research on this area and many failed to even use anecdotal examples from the media. Nevertheless most were able to identify common gender stereotypes in the media and better answers also considered the extent to which representations of both men and women were becoming more diverse. Some candidates also attempted to compare representations in the media with reality. In some cases candidates pointed out that women still occupied a narrow range of roles in the real world so the stereotypes might have some validity. There were some well informed answers which drew on feminist theory and research to support the view e.g. Tuchman on symbolic annihilation of women, Mulvey on the male gaze, Meehan on stereotypes in soaps, Wolf on the beauty myth and Ferguson on the cult of femininity. A few candidates skilfully linked theories and research with contemporary examples from the media. Most candidates were able to draw on some evidence against the view. Better answers drew on Connell's work on new masculinities, and considered more diverse representations of women e.g. ladettes, women in professional and action roles and changes in advertising of different products. Some candidates also referred to changing representations of gay men and lesbians.
- 4 (a) Most candidates were able to identify two ways with the most popular being censorship/age restrictions and the 9.00. p.m. watershed. A smaller number of candidates referred to self-censorship/gate keeping and the intervention of owners. A few candidates misunderstood the question and simply discussed how the media represented violence. While most candidates identified two ways accurately few were able to offer very detailed explanations. Better candidates were able to point to the role of regulatory bodies such as the BBFC and Ofcom and the best contextualised their answers by discussing research on media violence and concerns about its effects on children.

- (b)** This question produced a broad range of answers. Weaker candidates often had limited or confused understanding of moral panics. Many candidates confused more general panics inspired by the media with moral panics and cited 'The War of the Worlds', bird flu, SARs and global warming as examples of moral panics. Better answers were able to use at least one or two examples of moral panics to illustrate their answers though most candidates seemed unaware of any studies other than Cohen on the mods and rockers. Other examples cited included paedophiles (almost always misspelled!), mugging, AIDs and raves/ecstasy and hoodie wearers. Weaker answers were often simply descriptive of moral panics without analysing the stages in the process and role of media and other agents. Better candidates had a clear notion of the development of moral panics and discussed the role of social control agencies, moral entrepreneurs and the general public. While few candidates were able to use many studies some were very strong on concepts e.g. folk devils, deviance amplification, sensationalism, prediction, sensitization, reaction by social control agencies. Many candidates struggled effectively to counter the view in the question. Some candidates got sidetracked into discussions of media effects theory often equating moral panics with a hypodermic model of the media and then attempting to use two-step flow and selective perception models in criticism. Other candidates pointed to the role of the audience in moral panics or argued that without an actual act of deviance moral panics could not occur so the media were not entirely to blame. A very few candidates considered the Marxist view that moral panics were not simply created by the media but reflected concerns by the ruling class to maintain hegemony.

### OPTION 3 RELIGION

- 5 (a) Only a small number of candidates opted to answer this question. Of those who did, most were able to identify two ways, although a number of candidates identified two ways that overlapped to such a degree that only one way could be credited. The most popular responses related to attitudes to homosexuality, patriarchal attitudes to women, restrictions on sex outside marriage and celibacy of clergy. Weaker answers were often underdeveloped. Few candidates were able to cite research but better answers typically illustrated their points with examples drawn from specific religions' teaching and practices and offered a clear explanation of how these might control sexuality.
- (b) There was a range of responses to this question. Although it was not a popular question, there were some very strong responses, usually citing concepts and theories. Other candidates had a reasonable grasp of the issues raised by the question. Most candidates typically discussed Weber's work on Calvinism often together with other examples of religion causing social change such as Liberation Theology, Ghandi, Martin Luther King and the Iranian revolution. Most candidates were able to offer some arguments against, typically based on Marxist and/or Functionalist approaches. Candidates were mainly differentiated by the depth and breadth of knowledge with the best candidates often giving quite detailed and sophisticated accounts of the Protestant ethic thesis as well as a range of other evidence. Most candidates offered a balanced account but weaker answers often simply juxtaposed theories while better answers were more explicitly evaluative. The best candidates were able to offer quite detailed critiques of Weber. Some candidates discussed fundamentalist movements pointing out that they could be seen as either opposing or promoting change. A surprising number of answers focused almost exclusively on issues surrounding personal or individual changes brought about by religion and were typically very weak.
- 6 (a) Most candidates were able to identify two differences. In some responses, candidates understanding of cults was less developed than of sects. A few candidates identified differences that were not universally applicable e.g. sects are bigger than cults or longer-lived and cults have charismatic leaders sects do not. Accurate responses tended to refer to sects having a claim on a monopoly of truth while cults do not, greater commitment demanded by sects and sects having a more clearly defined membership. Surprisingly few candidates made use of examples of either sects or cults to illustrate their answers. There were a number of responses where candidates were unclear about the distinctions or confused sects with cults.

- (b) This question was generally much less well answered than 5(b). Many candidates appeared to have quite limited knowledge of NRMs often only referring to Wallis's typology and perhaps the growth in numbers of NRMs. Some candidates appeared to have prepared for a general question on secularisation but failed to address the specific requirements of this question. Surprisingly few candidates were able to cite even one example of a NRM. Many candidates focused mainly on standard material on secularisation concerning decline in mainstream religion. Better candidates were able to point to the ways in which NRMs might offer a different appeal to mainstream religion. Some also referred to postmodern arguments about religious shoppers and individualization of beliefs but even these were rarely well illustrated with research or examples. Some candidates referred to Stark and Bainbridge's work on the continuing need for religion, while in opposing the view some candidates made relevant points about the limited membership and social influence of NRMs.

#### OPTION 4 YOUTH AND CULTURE

- 7 (a) This question was not generally well answered and many candidates appeared to struggle with the requirements of the question. Some candidates failed to specify any differences in subject choice and simply focused on why differences existed while a few even asserted that they no longer existed. Other candidates discussed the subject choices of boys as one way and those of girls as another. Better candidates identified two ways, for example science for boys, arts for girls, differences in options for design and technology, differences in sporting activities and differences in vocational courses. Explanations tended to focus on family socialisation, the influence of teachers, peer group pressure, future aspirations and the gendered nature of certain subjects. Few candidates were able to refer to specific studies or research evidence in their answers and those that did typically referred to Oakley on gender socialisation or Sharpe on girls' changing aspirations. There was a tendency for candidates to answer this question in a commonsensical manner.
- (b) There were some good answers to this question with many including some reference to studies. However, a significant proportion of candidates produced answers that drew on material that was of marginal relevance and did not focus on school subcultures. Some candidates discussed more general research on class and education e.g. Bourdieu's work on cultural capital or research on classroom labelling while others discussed general material on class and youth subcultures but discussed material on skinheads, punks etc rather than specifically school subcultures. Candidates were rewarded appropriately where they could link this to the question. Better answers made use of the standard material e.g. Hargreaves, Willis, Mac an Ghail and Woods. In evaluation, where this was present, most candidates referred to material showing that gender and ethnicity might also be a basis for formation of school subcultures.

- 8**      **(a)**      There was a range of responses to this question. Most candidates were able to offer responses with some relevant reasons, though some failed to clearly specify their two reasons and appeared to discuss three or four. Reasons cited included common interests, influence of media, extension of school leaving age, increase in spending power of young and as a form of protest as well as issues to do with class, gender and ethnicity. Better candidates typically produced more theoretical and conceptual responses, for example drawing on the CCCS's work on resistance, Cohen's work on status frustration and Functionalist accounts emphasizing the function of youth subcultures in facilitating the transition from childhood to adulthood.
- (b)**      There was a range of responses to this question with a significant number of weaker answers that tended to be anecdotal and lacked development. Many candidates attempted to address arguments both for and against. Better answers were able to offer some examples of research neglecting females, typically studies by the CCCS though not always named. Most candidates also seemed aware of McRobbie and Garber's research on bedroom subculture and used this to counter the view. There were some very good responses that showed detailed knowledge of a range of studies and subcultures. These often not only referred to standard studies but also discussed more recent involvement of girls in groups such as ladettes, New Wave and 'riot girls' as well as Campbell's work on girl gangs. Some candidates also pointed to the emergence of less gendered subcultures such as punk and Goths. A few candidates attempted to discuss postmodern theories and research on girls in ethnic minorities though this was rarely well developed.



## **2534 - Sociological research skills (Written Examination)**

### **General Comments**

There is evidence that a higher proportion of candidates understand the requirements of this examination. Virtually all candidates answered every question part and responses demonstrate that candidates are aware of the assessment objectives involved in each question. Many candidates were able to acknowledge the given contexts / research design given in Item B and in question (d), although a large number of responses merely paid lip-service to the context. There still remains a stark difference between those candidates who have a strong technical understanding of key concepts and of their relevance to the research design and the given context and the weaker candidates who either throw all the concepts in together, or leave them out completely. There is still huge confusion between the terms reliability and validity and candidates use representatives in the wrong context.

### **Teaching Tip:**

Encourage students to practice their skills needed in this examination by giving them a number of different research contexts to help with part (c) and (d) questions.

The other characteristic of weaker responses was the ability to offer only a generalised description of a research method for parts (c) and (d) without any consideration for the given research context.

Where candidates performed well, they had clearly been prepared for the nature of the questions and focused on the demands of each part from the outset. Good candidates are able to engage with the given research contexts and understand the need to include reference to the key research concepts. In particular, high level responses were able to reach the higher levels in part (c) questions, where they were clearly focused on the explicit strength / weakness related to the given research aim, and were able to offer more than one reasons for explaining why it was a strength / weakness. In part (d) questions stronger candidates successfully applied their chosen method to the research context given, rather than just mechanically outlining and assessing its usefulness. Many high achieving candidates have clearly been well prepared for targeting the assessment objectives of each question and many centres are encouraging students to answer questions in a formulaic way in order to achieve this.

### Comments on Individual Questions

- 1) (a) Most candidates had some understanding of the term 'validity' in relation to sociological research. The vast majority of answers focused on issues of accuracy and truth in relation to the research results / data, but to be awarded marks in the top band, candidates needed to recognise that validity is also about testing whether the research measures what it set out to measure. Candidates who included both of these aspects of the definition and then offered some further explanation or examples were awarded full marks. The majority of candidates gained additional marks, even when their answer was partial, by referencing links to qualitative data, unstructured interviews, Interpretivism and examples of research methods which may yield invalid results were also credited. Overall, responses were poorer than in previous sessions, with fewer candidates scoring the full six marks. A number of candidates were confusing validity with the concept 'reliability' and there were a number of candidates who wrote far in excess of what is required for a 6 mark answers. Candidates may need to be reminded that they should be spending no more than five minutes answering this question.

#### Teaching Tip:

Devise a key concepts quiz as a lesson starter. Ask students to match a method to a concept and a definition for example.

- (b) The majority of candidates were able to successfully interpret the data and identify two main differences. The majority were able to correctly analyse the data in term of the percentage differences, to gain a total of 6 marks, and there was an increase in the number of answers which were rewarded full marks by also expressing the scale of change (for example, 'more than doubled'; or 'a difference of 17%'). A significant number of candidates failed to interpret the data accurately and cited only minor differences, for which they failed to score any marks. In particular, many of these candidates cited 'sex and pregnancy' as a main difference. Candidates need to be trained to read the question carefully to focus on whether the analysis is asking for differences or trends and respond accordingly. Some candidates went beyond the expectations of the question by explaining the differences, and this will penalise them later as it is wasting time. although some candidates offered elaborate responses which make it difficult for Examiners to identify the key points to reward. Candidates should be encouraged to state "The first main difference is ..." and start the second main difference as a clearly separate point. A number of candidates need to practice their skills of data analysis in the way they express this in a written format. Candidates who failed to express the differences in a logical and accurate way were placed at the bottom of the decided mark band.

#### Teaching Tip:

Teach students the skills of data interpretation. Use publications such as 'Social Trends' and data from the 'Office for National Statistics' to do this.

- (c) The vast majority of candidates correctly identified one main strength and weakness and were able to offer some explanations of these. A small minority identified relevant strengths but failed to explain them and a handful a candidates cited inaccurate strengths (for example, confusing semi-structured interviews for questionnaires).

**Teaching Tip:**

Give students past question (c)'s and Item Bs and a set structure for answering it: Identify and explain the strength; relate it to a research concept; include reference to the context and the aims of the research.

**AO1**

The vast majority of candidates were familiar with the methods given in Item B and they were able to reference at least one appropriate key concept. Many, however, failed to explain why this was a strength or to explain what the key concept meant. For example, candidates could state that Group interviews were a strength because it was valid, but they didn't offer an explanation of why this may be. Alternatively, many candidates offered elaborate explanation of, for example, structured questionnaires being good because they produced comparable data, but didn't cement full marks as they failed to mention a key concept. Some candidates made good use of triangulation as a chosen strength, but often failed to cement full marks as they did not explain why triangulation is a strength in designing research, or what triangulation actually is. Some candidates are very confused with the concept of representativeness. In relation to this given research context, representativeness was not an obvious strength because only one city was selected. Also, some candidates made the inaccurate link between structured questionnaires and representativeness, assuming a large sample, which wasn't actually stated. Some candidates selected the census as a method, but it was just a way of accessing a sample and there was a lot of misunderstanding about this. Many candidates remain confused about some of the key concepts and this needs to be reinforced. A small minority of candidates misinterpreted the rubric and identified only one strength / weakness or, alternatively, discussed multiple ones.

**AO2**

Most candidates are successfully referring to the given context. In this case, specific reference needed to be made to 'house sharing' as this is who the research was focused on. A substantial number of answers, however, did not mention house sharing at all and therefore couldn't attain any more than two marks for AO2 for each stated strength / weakness. Very few candidates scored 15 or 16 marks for this question as they failed to address the aims of the research – in this case, exploring the experiences of house-sharers.

- (d) The majority of candidates allocated most of their time to this question and most candidates successfully focused on just one research method and referred to the given context. It is clear that many centres are preparing their candidates for the demands of this question as candidates are explicit in their use of key concepts, the wider research process and the given context. However, there continues to be a marked difference between high and low level responses to this question.

The hallmark of good responses was the ability of the candidate to apply their knowledge and understanding of one method to the given research context and to think through aspects of the wider research process. Good candidates really engaged with the context when thinking through operationalisation and sampling techniques. For example, better responses linked their method to an appropriate sampling technique, for instance, using snowball or volunteer sampling for unstructured interviews with the acceptance that representativeness would be an issue. It was refreshing to see many candidates discussing issues such as access and ethics; the context was well addressed, for example, when students were discussing ethical issues involved in using schools as sampling frames. Most candidates focused on questionnaires or interviews and there were many candidates who displayed a range of knowledge and understanding of the actual chosen method and the related key concepts. Many centres continue to provide their students with a framework for answering this question and whilst this has the advantage of ensuring the student addresses the method, concepts, and process, many of these answers lacked reference to the context and students really do need to practise these questions with a variety of different research scenarios.

Weaker responses tended to offer generalised knowledge of methods; for example, by failing to state which type of questionnaire / interview; or offering more than one method as is stated in the question. Other weak responses focused on sampling techniques at the expense of research methods and / or offered confused / inaccurate references to key research concepts. Many weaker candidates discuss issues of generalisability in relation to the method, rather than the sample. Although more candidates are referring to the wider research process, weaker students do not express understanding. For example, they state that 'concepts need operationalising' or 'ethics need to be taken into account', but do not follow this with any elaboration. A large number of candidates offer a generalised answer without any real consideration of the context; for example, getting a stratified random sample, with no elaboration as to how they would do this. A number of candidates chose participant observation and, unless some reference was made to asking questions, these responses tended to be limited as it's not possible to observe parents' 'concerns'.

Nearly all candidates expressed some evaluation but weaker responses only justified their choice of method / sampling and offered no negative criticisms. Good responses included an evaluative and reflective tone throughout their responses, for example by noting the strengths and weaknesses of their sampling technique as well as the stated method and addressed ethical concerns as a researcher. Such responses were well contextualised and referred to the key concepts in an evaluative way.

## **2535: - Research Report (Sociology)**

### **General Comments**

Once again many interesting Reports of a very high standard were received for moderation. Many of the candidates were able to discuss, analyse and evaluate their chosen study in a confident and mature manner. They were able to use technical terminology accurately and apply methodological concepts to the context of their studies. Nevertheless there are still a few candidates who fail to demonstrate their understanding of the key concepts and who disadvantage themselves by ignoring guidelines that have been published in previous Reports or suggestions that have been made by Moderators in the Report to a Centre on Coursework Moderation that is sent to each individual centre. All centres would be wise to take note of these Reports as they aim to give constructive advice as well as highlighting strengths and good practice.

### **Administrative points**

The dates for the submission of the MS1 form remain the same each session (10th of January or 15th of May). A number of centres were late submitting their MS1 forms this session. It should also be noted that all the Reports should be included with the MS1 if the centre has 10 or fewer candidates.

The Centre Authentication Form continues to cause some confusion for a minority of centres. There is no need to send a form for all candidates. OCR requires that one Centre Authentication Form, signed by the teacher, be sent with the sample and candidates' signatures are obtained in a way that is convenient to the centre and retained at the centre.

Very few clerical errors were noted this session. Nevertheless many Reports were submitted without the candidate number or with an incorrect candidate number.

The majority of centres returned the samples that were requested promptly.

The majority of candidates now word process their Reports. Once again there were some centres that continue to submit Reports on loose sheets of paper – sometimes not even stapled together. Ideally all Reports should be submitted in the answer book, this would ensure that all candidates are aware of and have the opportunity to respond to the prompts at the beginning of each section.

## **Application of the Mark Scheme**

The vast majority of centres applied the mark scheme consistently and accurately across all Assessment Objectives. One or two centres applied the mark scheme rather harshly but lenient application of the mark scheme was generally the issue when marks had to be adjusted. Centres are advised to take note of the comments made on the Report to a Centre on Coursework Moderation. Some centres are drifting towards becoming more lenient, if this is so it will be noted on the Report to Centre. If this trend continues it is possible that marks will be adjusted in future sessions.

Details of internal standardisation were received from some centres. All centres that have more than one person assessing the Reports should include details of the procedures used for internal standardisation and Reports should show evidence of being standardised.

The majority of candidates are now making explicit references to the key concepts in section (c) and (d). Nevertheless many do need to develop these references to justify being awarded marks in the higher mark band e.g. candidates will often refer to quantitative data as being reliable without further explanation. Reliability is the concept which continues to cause problems for many candidates.

Detailed comments were included on the front cover sheets of most Reports. There were also some excellent annotations on the Reports themselves. This is very useful in ascertaining how the centre had applied the mark scheme. Nevertheless there continues to be a minority of centres who use comments that have little relevance to the requirements of the mark scheme. Other centres highlight possible weaknesses in their comments but then award marks in the higher mark bands. Assessors should ensure that comments accurately reflect the mark scheme and are directed at the moderator, not the candidate.

Most candidates had used the word limit permitted thereby giving them the opportunity to develop the points they were making. Centres should be reminded that candidates who exceed the word count by more than 10% should be placed at the bottom of the relevant mark band.

## **Academic matters**

It is pleasing to note a positive move by many centres toward ensuring that candidates report on a variety of contemporary studies. The use of such studies can inform other aspects of the syllabus and enhances the sociological experience of the candidates. There is also evidence that centres are using a wider range of studies, rather than having candidates reporting on a narrow range of studies/research.

However some centres continue to use material that can disadvantage candidates. Summaries of research continue to pose a problem. Candidates are often tempted to rely heavily on the source material – they should be giving their own analysis and evaluation of the study rather than re-wording (or in some instances copying) another person's thoughts on a particular study. Centres are strongly advised to ensure that they have a collection of suitable material that can be used by candidates. OCR is willing to supply centres with a resource list. Using a range of studies would help ensure that candidates are using suitable material. A few candidates had attempted to report on studies that are rather challenging and consequently found it difficult to produce a concise and coherent Report.

## **Using the research Report Answer Book**

### **Section (a)**

The vast majority of candidates had completed section (a) correctly. In a minority of cases it was apparent that someone other than the candidate had completed this section. It must be emphasised that the correct completion of this section is part of the task (AO1).

### **Section (b)**

Many candidates gave detailed accounts of the research design and made accurate use of technical terms. The stronger candidates clearly and precisely identified the aims, research tool(s) and sampling technique. They also referred to relevant ethical issues.

Some candidates presented a rather confused section (b) whilst others gave a vague outline of the research design and omitted some key details/issues.

### **Section (c)**

Some of the stronger candidates wrote an excellent section (c). They gave their own interpretations as to the suitability of the research design, with reference to the aims and the context of the study. Key concepts and technical terms were used with confidence and all aspects of the research/study were considered (some weaker candidates often omitted references to the sample in this section). Weaker candidates often repeated much of section (b) or discussed the research design in a general way without reference to the context of the study or the key concepts. All aspects of the research should be discussed, in the context of the study, when candidates are awarded very high marks for AO2 (a). They should also be making explicit references to the key concepts.

### **Section (d)**

The vast majority of the candidates did refer to the main findings and the stronger candidates were able to link findings to the aims and evaluative points. Weaker candidates continued to include far too many findings – 100 words should be sufficient. Other candidates quoted the appendix without attempting any analysis of the findings. The few candidates who had no reference to the findings were penalising themselves under AO2(a)

The vast majority of candidates included references to the key concepts in section (d). However, it should be noted, that these references should be developed in a manner which explicitly demonstrates the candidates' understanding before being awarded marks in the higher mark bands.

## **Appendices**

Many candidates took the opportunity to use an appendix (see prompt at the top of section (d)) to illustrate their findings; all candidates could be encouraged to follow this good practice. Candidates who do not use appendices often include long quotes from the text and penalise themselves by using up valuable words which could have been used to analyse and/or evaluate. Once again centres should note that any additional information e.g. details of the sampling included in the appendix, cannot be considered for assessment purposes.

## **2536 - Power and Control**

### **General Comments**

The overall standard was similar to January 2006. Most candidates performed to good standard and the majority of candidates displayed a wide knowledge base with a sound understanding of concepts and studies. Theoretical knowledge was present in the responses of most candidates but often this was generalised rather than being applied to the specifics of the question. Candidates should be encouraged to address the question from the outset rather than feel the need to explain the background to a particular perspective. This also applies to historical knowledge which is often displayed in responses to questions on health, education and social policy and welfare regardless of the demands of the particular question set.

Differences within perspectives were recognised more consistently in this session for example in relation to feminism although weaker candidates tended to describe studies by any sociologist they could remember when a particular theory was highlighted in the question.

Some candidates displayed such a wide ranging knowledge of studies that the responses tended towards a 'list like' approach which, given the time constraints of the exam, detracted from their analysis of the studies. Candidates should be encouraged to consider why they are including a particular study in relation to the actual question set.

Once again, there was some evidence of 'question spotting' where the demands of the question were ignored and candidates responded to the question they would have preferred to have been set.

Interpretation and analysis was a weaker skill area for most candidates although stronger responses continually related their analysis of theories, concepts and studies to the question. Candidates should be encouraged to consider the material they have included in terms of how it relates to the question. Reflection in terms of asking themselves 'so?', 'therefore?' 'how does this answer the question?' should be encouraged.

Interpretation of concepts in relation to contemporary examples/events was stronger in this session demonstrating the ability to relate sociological knowledge to current events. Sometimes, however, this tended towards over-long anecdotes which were not sourced in any way. When media sources are used they should be identified clearly rather than 'I watched a programme on the television which showed.....'

Some candidates interpreted the question in a thoughtful way but were unable to support their ideas with data or studies. Very few responses however were entirely impressionistic and anecdotal in this session.

Evaluation was, again, the weakest skill area which was often entirely based on the juxtaposition of theories or studies. Key words and phrases were utilised more often, for example, 'however', 'on the other hand' 'an alternative view is suggested by' but it was not always clear what the nature of the evaluation was. Candidates should be encouraged to consider the precise criticism being made when stating that someone disagrees with a concept/theory/study. Methodological evaluation, in particular tended to be imprecise with a common tendency to state that a particular study lacked validity and/or reliability with no explanation as to why this was the case. These concepts were sometimes used incorrectly.



## *Report on the Units Taken in June 2006*

Some candidates wrote at considerable length about material which was tangential to the question but could have been used as evaluation. Candidates should be encouraged to be explicit that the material they are utilising disagrees with or contradicts the previous studies/theories/concepts.

Many candidates were evaluating throughout their responses however, demonstrating the ability to evaluate positively as well as through the more common criticism of studies and theories. A few candidates attempted to evaluate positively but simply stating that 'this is a good study' without explaining why.

Much evaluation is still left to the end of essays with sometimes mere repetition of points already made. Weaker candidates tended towards assertion, impression and opinion in their conclusions without supporting theory or evidence.

Strong candidates were using conclusions to suggest gaps in sociological knowledge and possible areas for further research, which is to be encouraged.

The planning of essays continues to improve with fewer lengthy plans which use up valuable time. Many plans were coherent and logical with evidence that candidates were referring back to them and using them to structure their essays.

Some introductions were too long and generalised again using up valuable time in establishing historical contexts or attempting to define terms which were not central to the question or which are rather obvious. A few candidates considered it to be important to explain what 'assess' means!

Spelling errors were still present which sometimes altered the meaning of statements made, for example, 'capitalism has lowered morality rates this century'. Particular problems seem to occur with sociologists names. Proof reading at the end would result in some corrections of simpler mistakes and would also highlight some other errors, for example when social classes are wrongly identified, for example, 'the working class exploit the ruling class, according to Marxists'.

More candidates were using abbreviations this session to save time but sometimes this was difficult to understand when these abbreviations were not standard ones but personal to the candidate.

Most candidates appeared to have utilised the full hour and there were few rubric errors. There were few complete misinterpretations of questions.

## **Comments on individual questions**

### **Question 1**

This was a popular question and generally well answered. Some candidates, however, spent too long on generalised accounts of different types of feminism without relating the perspectives to crime and deviance. Some candidates interpreted feminism very loosely and included any sociologist they could remember under the umbrella of feminism. Weaker candidates were often confused about particular sociologists with a common error being Carlen's research being attributed to someone else (usually Heidensohn).

Weaker candidates failed to differentiate between theorists and simply stated that 'feminists believe...'. On occasions the evaluation of feminism was much longer than the feminist explanations themselves, for example from a Marxist perspective.

Some candidates assumed that anything about women or gender was feminist.

Strong candidates displayed a detailed knowledge of feminist theory and studies and were able to discuss both crime and deviance (the latter was often ignored by weaker candidates).

### **Question 2**

This was also a popular question and was, overall, answered more convincingly by a larger proportion of candidates than question 1. Stronger candidates displayed a thorough knowledge and understanding of a wide range of theories and studies.

Weaker candidates often lost focus on the issue of social class, however, with lengthy explanations of differences related to ethnicity and gender this was usually generalised without any attempt to show how these variables could be linked to social class.

Some candidates wrote at length about concepts and theories but were unable to support their points with evidence or relate the theory/concept to social class. This was common with the idea of labelling.

Most candidates were able to discuss a range of theories although differences between sociologists were sometimes not appreciated and all writers were placed together within a particular perspective as if they were all saying the same thing. This was particularly apparent with Merton, Cohen and Coward and Ohlin.

Some candidates lost focus on explanations and wrote at length about solutions to crime.

### **Question 3**

This was also a popular question and many candidates could cite and evaluate relevant studies and theories. Often however, candidates failed to recognise the importance of the word 'schools' in the question and spent much, sometimes most, time on how class inequalities in education were a product of non-school factors such as material or cultural deprivation.

Weaker candidates strayed from the question into inequalities related to gender and/or ethnicity with no attempt to link these with social class. A few candidates presented lengthy descriptions of the development of schooling for example accounts of the tripartite system.

Stronger candidates were able to evaluate well both between and within perspectives, for example within Marxists accounts utilising Willis to criticise Bowles and Gintis.

#### **Question 4**

This was a popular question and generally answered more convincingly than question 3. Many candidates were well-informed on range of explanations and most were able to differentiate between different ethnic groups.

A common weakness, however, was to lose focus on the question by justifiably raising the issues of class location as a variable but then discussing social class difference in their own right, at length. This also occurred, but less frequently, with gender differences.

Weaker candidates were unable to differentiate between ethnic groups and commonly, to place all 'Asians' in one group.

Some candidates lost focus by examining differences between ethnic groups in terms of other issues, for example deviance.

#### **Question 5**

This was a less popular question than questions 1,2,3 and 4 and was often not answered very convincingly, mainly because the idea of 'socially constructed' was not well understood. Many candidates wrote general accounts of inequalities in health and illness. Stronger candidates were able to demonstrate a wide ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding of relevant theories and studies.

#### **Question 6**

This was a more popular question than question 5 and generally answered well. Most candidates were able to examine a range of theories and studies relating to gender inequalities in a convincing way.

Some candidates wrote rather generalised and impressionistic accounts with a lack of supporting evidence. Weaker candidates lost focus of gender and wrote lengthy accounts of social class or, less frequently, ethnic inequalities.

#### **Question 7**

Few candidates attempted this question. Those who did generally understood the nature of popular culture well and were able to distinguish between different theories and examine a range of relevant studies. Some candidates failed to distinguish between dominant in the sense of the most widespread and dominant as the most powerful.

Some candidates wrote in general terms about popular culture but did not compare this type of culture with other types.

A minority of candidates wrote impressionistic accounts of aspects of popular culture, for example, music but with little focus on the question.

Grimace's interpretation of hegemony was often referred to but not generally well understood.

### **Question 8**

Again, only a few candidates attempted this question. The concept of identity was generally well understood and was linked to a range of issues, sometimes contrasting identities coming from leisure (often related to consumption) with more traditional sources of identity such as social class. Useful references to globalisation were often made.

Weaker candidates wrote generalised accounts about leisure activities frequently examining access to leisure activities without relating this to the construction of identities.

### **Question 9**

This was a more popular question than question 7 or question 8.

Stronger candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of how a range of social groups could be seen as being controlled by the Welfare State often focussing on issues relating to gender, ethnicity and mental health.

Some candidates failed to directly address the concept of social control and wrote generally about welfare provision.

### **Question 10**

This was also more popular than questions 7 and 8. Stronger candidates were able to focus clearly on the concepts of collectivism and individualism and had an impressive knowledge of welfare provision since 1979 including very recent developments. Weaker candidates often ignored the date in the question and wrote at length about earlier periods (usually focussing on Beveridge) Collectivism and individualism were sometimes misinterpreted by weaker candidates.

### **Question 11**

This was not a very popular question. Stronger candidates had a good understanding of the main features of global social movements and were able to analyse clearly a range of different explanations. Weaker candidates tended to write impressionistic accounts with little reference to relevant theory or concepts. Some candidates interpreted the question as being about new social movements and ignored the notion of 'global'.

### **Question 12**

Again, not a popular question. The idea of collective protest was generally well understood but often this was not linked to the formation of identities. Stronger candidates were able to utilise a range of examples particularly focussing on gender and ethnicity.

Evaluation tended to be less developed in responses to this question, although stronger candidates were able to compare the influence of collective protest with other sources of identity such as ethnicity. Weaker candidates wrote at some length about different examples of collective protest but failed to relate this to identity formation.

## 2537 - Applied Sociological Research Skills

### General comments

There was clear evidence from the scripts that many candidates had been well prepared for this paper. They also appeared to have engaged with the theme of the paper. Most candidates attempted all parts of the question demonstrating understanding of the skills required by each of the parts however some of the weaker candidates had not allocated their time according to the guidance on the paper that is to spend 30 minutes on (a) – (c) and an hour on (d) and (e). They appeared to spend too long on the first three parts and they consequently wrote an answer to (d) that was rather brief and undeveloped and were then in a weak position in relation to part (e). The ability to write a detailed and wide-ranging response to these two parts was the main differentiator although there were some candidates who wrote excellent answers to (d) and (e) but were less skilled when it came to (a) – (c). Once again a few candidates chose to do (d) and (e) first but, as in previous sessions, there seemed little evidence to suggest that they did any better than those who worked their way through from part (a) and again, as with previous sessions there were some candidates who did this who then appeared to have left themselves too little time to do (a) – (c).

A few candidates did the opposite and wrote very good answers to (d) and (e) but lost marks on (a) – (c) often because they seemed less skilled up as far as these parts were concerned.

### Teaching Tip:

When candidates are looking at past papers some time should be spent considering parts (a) – (c). After exploring different types of data past part (a)s could be done as a timed question every week for a few weeks until all members of the class are regularly gaining full marks. Perhaps the first sociology lesson of the week?

### Comments on individual parts of the question

#### Part (a)

Many candidates were able to identify two reasons why sociologists would consider the data collected to be reliable.' and were able to demonstrate a clear understanding of reliability. However this part proved to be a discriminator between candidates on two bases. First there were candidates who could not extrapolate the two points from the stimulus material and secondly there were candidates who demonstrated a lack of understanding of what reliability means. The most common error was to suggest that because the structured interviews took place in the respondents' homes that would make them reliable. Candidates who did this then tended to go on to confuse validity with reliability. Reliability is one of the key methodological concepts and candidates should have learnt it in their AS year. An understanding of all of the key concepts is important not just for this paper but also for part (c) on the synoptic paper and as evaluation on Power and Control. Some students did not think it was necessary to explicitly link reliability to the points they were identifying they simply said structured interviews were used, they employ standardised procedures and have set questions so that makes them reliable. They must in order to be awarded full marks say why that would make them reliable.

### Teaching Tip:

Verbally test candidates at the start of a lesson on these concepts.  
Put clear definitions on the walls or hang them from the ceiling.

### **Part (b)**

There are 8 marks for this part and in order to gain full marks candidates had to develop the strength and weakness of using structured interviews and to do this in relation to the context of whether social class influences the consumption of 'junk food'. The ability to contextualise seems to be a skill that continues to elude many candidates and consequently they are throwing two marks away. This part is a 'warm up' for parts (d) and (e). Candidates must be able to put themselves in the shoes of a sociologist doing research in the particular area using the given method. Most candidates knew what a structured interview was and were able to identify the strength as being set questions, standardised procedures and then link that to reliability and the weakness that the researcher could not probe the respondent and the respondent themselves could not explain what they meant and link that to validity. A few either misread the question or did not know what a structured interview was and 'lumped' all interviews together and then proceeded to get themselves in a muddle with the strength and weakness. Some candidates made good use of recent media coverage of children and junk food and linked that to the weakness of a structured interview in that because many people now know that 'junk food' is not good for them they therefore might have been embarrassed to tell the interviewer the truth.

#### **Teaching Tip:**

After practising all past papers ask students to identify contemporary issues that are relevant to 2539 and then in pairs or small groups get them to consider the strengths and weaknesses of different methods in relation to finding out more about the issues. They should try to put themselves in the shoes of a professional sociologist.

### **Part (c)**

As mentioned in previous reports the marks for this part are for AO2(a) Interpretation and Analysis and candidates must therefore do more than simply describe the findings. As in previous sessions the strongest candidates used terms such as highest, lowest, differences, similarities and so on. They were able to make comparisons and identify patterns and trends. Weaker candidates listed some of the data in the table, often without statistics to support their points, and then lifted the data from the text.

#### **Teaching Tip:**

Candidates should use the data on past papers to practice using terms such as most, least, in comparison etc.

There were fewer candidates this session wasting time making assertions or suppositions about the data. Such assertions attract no marks and it is important to continue to remind candidates of this. Some candidates continue to try to play around with the data and engage in 'fancy' maths that they then usually get wrong. The focus of the summary should have been on what was in the text and table. In order to reach the top mark level candidates must summarise the data fully not just give one piece of information from the text and one from the table. The question says summarise and candidates should know that this means they should cover all of the data and in doing so use accurate statistics to support what they are saying.

#### **Teaching Tip:**

Candidates should look for contemporary data relevant to the other two A2 papers and practice summarising it fully. This could be done as a class exercise / competition asking students in turn until someone cannot find anymore in which case they are 'out' and the exercise continues until the next person is 'out' and so on.

### **Part (d)**

There were some excellent responses to this part. There appeared to be less evidence of the mechanistic learning of research design by mnemonics and the ignoring of the context and more evidence of candidates engaging with the scenario and thinking it through as a sociologist. Having said that there were candidates who went on autopilot at times especially as far as theory was concerned. Candidates should try to link their design to theoretical considerations the key being to make the link. A few candidates, and this seemed to be a centre issue, decided to start (d) and (e) with a quite often long generalised paragraph on theory. Better candidates linked their theoretical considerations to the brief given in Item B from the start. Most candidates were able to engage with the brief although a few did not know what a comprehensive school was and talked of the difficulty of doing research on very young children of 5/6. Most students chose appropriate methods usually either questionnaires or structured interviews and were able to justify why they had chosen the particular method. A few candidates spent most of (d) describing several methods. On the whole candidates should be advised that they would be better to choose one method, explain why that method in relation to the context and then spend the rest of the time considering other aspects of the research design. Sampling seemed less of a problem than in previous sessions and most of those who referred to a sampling frame identified school registers as a useful starting point. The idea of a representative sample was accessible to most candidates who suggested that it would be important to obtain a cross section of males and females and different ethnic groups. Some candidates went on autopilot here too as they thought it would be important to obtain a cross section of students from all social classes. Few candidates explained representativeness as explicitly as they might it was often left implicit.

A number of candidates and again this tended to be a centre issue spent too long on (d) referring to previous research sometimes in considerable detail. Whilst a brief reference to previous research is often useful, in order to gain top marks there is no need to refer to any past research and certainly not in the detail that some did since it meant they often lost focus on the specifics of this question.

### **Part (e)**

As with the last couple of sessions this section tended to be shorter than (d) but most candidates were able to identify a range of potential weaknesses to their research design and some solutions to the problems. The strongest candidates considered ways in which the key concepts impacted on the design as well as discussing theoretical implications. Ethical issues were often dealt with at great length in relation to consent and working with respondents under the age of 16. Weaker candidates tended to focus on practical problems to the detriment of any others. Most candidates were able to identify a range of weaknesses but sometimes unable to think about how to resolve them. Those who could used the key concepts of reliability, validity, representativeness and generalisability to help them, as well as other concepts such as respondent validation, reflexivity etc.

### **Teaching Tip:**

Give students a range of weaknesses and then in pairs or small groups they have a fixed period of time to resolve them.

Use a range of evaluative concepts on all past scenarios.

## **2538 - The Personal Study**

### **General Comments**

The overall impression gained by examiners this year was that there were still vastly variable standards between Centres but more encouragingly, there were overall fewer very weak candidates.

It continues to be the case that knowledge and understanding of the research process is still being side-stepped by some Centres in favour of the analysis of results. Performance for AO1 remains centre-specific and it still appears that teaching/guidance is being assessed rather than the candidate's own ability to carry out research.

The best candidates were those who explicitly understood the concept of a pilot study by creating a strategy and design that was small scale and which was manageable within the word count. They firstly located their study within a brief sociological rationale and then concentrated on the research process as a whole, exploring the theoretical connections of their chosen method(s), the concomitant strengths and weaknesses in relation to the key concepts of validity, reliability, representativeness and generalisability,. They demonstrated that they had fully understood the importance of accessing their target population with appropriate sampling techniques as well as paying due care and attention to ethical issues.

The best studies concentrated on a narrow focus with one or two clear and concise aims, which were linked explicitly to the hypothesis or research question. These aims and associated findings were later revisited in the analysis section and skilfully appraised in the evaluation section.

There were fewer candidates who exceeded the word limit this year which is an encouraging sign; however Centres must be aware of the penalties their candidates will incur if they do exceed the word count as stated on the mark scheme. The word count is between 2500 and 2750 words. In addition, a number of candidates are producing studies which are considerably lower than 2500 words and this should alert Centres to the fact that their candidates' work will lack the requisite detail and subsequently will score less. Some Centres are still assuming that material smuggled into the Appendix is one way of getting round the thorny issue of word limit restrictions. Please note that this is unacceptable and actually disadvantages candidates. The Appendix itself is not marked and Centres are therefore giving their candidates bad advice by recommending this type of action.

Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews came through as firm favourites in the methodological league, but interestingly this year more candidates attempted to experiment with Content Analysis in a range of thematic analyses. Although many candidates cursorily mentioned semiotics, it is clear that they are still lacking in knowledge and understanding of the complexity of the method itself and this needs to be rectified if Centres wish their candidates to adopt content analysis as their chosen method.

The vast majority of candidates continue to choose questionnaires as their method coupled with opportunity sampling. An unusually high number of candidates made flawed linkage to positivism and open-ended questions and many candidates were unsure where to place semi-structured interviews in the theoretical scheme of things.

More examiners felt that there were a greater number of studies which were reflective in tone in their consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of their piloted research. Additionally some candidates were able to create sophisticated solutions and suggestions for future developments. Weaker candidates demonstrated little understanding of what a pilot study involved and some seemed unaware altogether that they were actually carrying out a pilot. Some candidates still pre-pilot the pilot which is totally unnecessary.



Many examiners commented that Coursework Adviser's comments which would have helped candidates to focus their work are still being ignored. Very often where Advisers had commented on the vagueness or wide-ranging nature of the suggested Aims and had recommended modifications, many candidates totally disregarded this advice and proceeded with their original intentions to the detriment of their research. It is still evident that Centres are allowing their candidates to carry out research well before coursework approval is gained and consequently the advice to change some aspects of the pilot for the better has gone unheeded.

This was especially true in cases when candidates had been advised to operationalise concepts. Operationalisation of central concepts continues to baffle the majority of candidates and presumably their teachers alike. This is a major failing and has a severe knock-on effect on the rest of the study. Candidates fail to realise that operationalisation is the breaking down of key terms into measurable units which assists them in measuring what they set out to measure. The majority of candidates are falling into the trap of defining these key terms. Some candidates went as far as defining quite basic things such as males and females, which is a ludicrous development at A2 and frustrating for examiners to read.

Most Centres have taken on board ethical issues when conducting research. Even so, there were a few candidates whose piloted research was highly unethical. It is up to teachers to check over their candidates' questionnaire or interview schedule for probing questions into illegal activities of their respondents.

The research diary by all accounts appears to have become an endangered species but in the rare cases when it was implemented, candidates were able to use it effectively as their sounding board for 'checking on their progress' and considering solutions to problems, but for the majority of candidates diaries served no useful purpose at all.

Finally, in terms of admin, some Centres are not attaching a front cover assessment sheet to their candidates' studies which is needed for examiner marks and annotation and this needs to be addressed. Please note that ONE centre authentication form is required per centre before grades can be awarded.

### **Assessment Objective 1: Knowledge and Understanding**

This section commands the highest marks, yet commonly with all previous years, this was the section given the least consideration by a large number of candidates. The key to scoring highly in this section is to have detailed and wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of the whole research process. The weakest candidates in this section tended to either concentrate on a few aspects of the research process or consider it in a generic way without personalisation.

The nature of the pilot study should be explained in the Rationale since it accounts for decisions and strategies as they unfold during the research process.

The best candidates provided a set of clear and concise aims that were explicitly relevant to the hypothesis/central research issue and which also linked to their referenced sociological study, used as a background focus to set the scene. Weaker candidates had aims which lacked clarity or were too ambitious. Many candidates had aims which did not relate well to the hypothesis or research question and consequently lost focus on what it was they actually intended to measure.

The majority of candidates were able to link their chosen strategy and device(s) to a theoretical perspective but weaker candidates made flawed connections to theory by claiming positivists use 'open ended questions' and interpretivists need quantitative data.

## *Report on the Units Taken in June 2006*

In terms of the research device, the research method was generally well justified and the type of data obtained discussed. However some candidates were still unsure of the differences between structured and semi-structured interviews. A rather alarming number of candidates failed to include transcripts of interviews or examples of questionnaires, so that it was difficult for examiners to tell if any research had actually been carried out.

The most able candidates used wide ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of representativeness/generalisability, validity and reliability effectively and accurately whilst acknowledging the limitations a pilot study imposed upon these concepts. Weaker candidates still confused validity and reliability and used them interchangeably.

The most able candidates dealt with sampling procedures in a sophisticated way and within an appropriate scale. However, overall it was felt by most examiners that there was little appreciation of an 'appropriate' sampling technique and choice seemed to be based on opportunity sampling and "whoever I can find". Some candidates referred to a stratified sampling technique when confronted with gender or ethnicity but had little awareness of how to apply it in proportional terms. Candidates were often unsure about basic techniques such as random sampling and made the assumption that equal numbers of males and females could be generated as if by magic. Studies involving content analysis still failed to provide any justification as to how the sample material being studied had been selected. Candidates seem to feel it is fine to pick up a few magazines or watch a few adverts on TV. Many candidates still confused sampling frame with target population and some did not address how they were going to sample their respondents at all and whether access via a gatekeeper was a sensible option. Little thought seems to be given to sampling as an integral part of the research process and Centres are advised to explore sampling techniques in much greater depth in future.

In terms of ethical practices, the recent emphasis on keeping the pilot studies 'clean, healthy and safe' seems to be working. Ethical issues were considered appropriately but very few candidates discussed ethical dilemmas which could occur especially in relation to the 'full-blown' study.

Most studies had clear sections and in general spelling, punctuation and grammar posed few problems this year. Although this was mentioned last year, some Centres are still loading too much into the Appendix section making it bulky and unwieldy to handle. In fact one candidate submitted 31 pages of graphs. Centres must be encouraged to think positively about wastage and the impact on the environment!

**Assessment Objective 2(a): Interpretation and Analysis**

Many candidates are still finding this section difficult and it is a clear discriminator between strong and weak candidates. Weaker candidates described what they found often with pages of unnecessary pie charts and bar charts. The more able candidates were able to give quite sophisticated commentary regarding their findings. The best research tied the findings to the aims of the study and the selected evidence was analysed and interpreted and compared/contrasted with the background research previously discussed in the Rationale.

The most able candidates did an excellent job of justifying their chosen methodology and strategy by linking it back to their aims as well as clearly operationalising concepts by breaking them down into measurable units. Many did this well and often it was the result of responding to the advice on the Proposal Form. Some candidates stated their intention to operationalise concepts but completely failed to do so and this really did impact upon the quality of their study but overall the majority of candidates merely defined their concepts without actually realising that the concepts had to be unpacked in order to be 'measured'. Other candidates expected that operationalisation would be solved via their research device. Candidates carrying out content analysis failed to operationalise the behaviours/characteristics being studied. The problem of operationalisation does appear to be a major hurdle for most candidates and this area does need to be addressed. It is quite clear to examiners that without operationalisation being performed at the start of their research, the candidate is clearly hampered since they are unaware of what they are actually trying to discover from their pilot.

The best candidates not only related their findings from the analysed data quite specifically to their aims but also linked their findings to the study outlined in the Rationale revealing ability to contrast or compare these with their own in the conclusions drawn. Weaker candidates simply presented the results in a descriptive way. It is still a cause for concern that graphs are being included without a summary and many are disembodied from the text.

Candidates do need to spend more time drawing conclusions in relation to their stated aims. Many candidates had no conclusions whatsoever and very few candidates were able to compare and contrast their findings with their background study in a sophisticated fashion.

Fewer candidates this year used more than one method but those that did found they could not analyse all of the data collected effectively within the restrictions of the word limit. Some candidates had far too lengthy devices with complicated sub-sections and consequently only partially analysed the research questions posed. It must be stressed that the Personal Study tests the candidate's awareness of the research process and strategy and it is recommended that the device be kept as short and as focused as possible.

**Assessment Objective 2(b): Evaluation**

The better able candidates were able to evaluate, analyse and be interpretive throughout. A considerable number of Centres followed a formulaic approach to evaluation and the evaluation in many cases was not rooted in the study.

Some candidates did not mention key concepts at all in their review of their pilot and too often these key concepts were mentioned as token gestures in a mechanical way and without any sense of engagement or genuine understanding. The majority of candidates appeared to handle Representativeness/generalisability reasonably well with a lack of representativeness being recognised as almost inevitable in a pilot but the solution however was nearly always seen in terms of merely increasing the sample size.

Most candidates were able to make some evaluative comments although there was a lack of balance. The key here is to apply reliability and validity equally to both the device and the evidence but this is proving hard for most candidates.

## *Report on the Units Taken in June 2006*

Many candidates seemed to think that anonymous questionnaires produced valid data because the answers were likely to be honest – well yes up to a point but the argument has to be fully developed to have any value.

Only a small number of candidates went into detail about researcher influence/values and subjective interpretations and how this impacted on their research.

Virtually all students touched on further developments with a typical solution to sample size being seen as mainly having a larger sample, although the actual increase in size was never thought through and discussed. Very rarely was there a reflection on the sampling process and whether there would be changes in the full-blown study.

In conclusion, it would appear that candidates are still not hitting the right notes. The area of focus, i.e. the research process, continues to be given short shrift with candidates being overly concerned with their findings. Many candidates are still experiencing the same common mistakes surrounding key research concepts and there is an inability for a large percentage of candidates to operationalise the concepts they intend to measure and resort instead to pure definition. Sampling continues to remain the most misunderstood and misapplied area of the research strategy. All Centres need to address these issues if candidates are to score highly in this unit next year.

Overall many examiners felt that this year there was very little creativity or 'sociological imagination' in the studies produced which merely reflected formulaic button punching with a feeling of disconnection between sections.

### 2539 - Social Inequality and Difference

Performance on this unit was similar to previous sessions with some outstanding scripts showing a detailed and wide ranging grasp of sociological issues from across the specification. Question one was the most popular question, with a very small number attempting question two. A significant number of candidates produced basic answers lacking in evidence and theoretical direction, this may be a product of the late timing of the exam, and was evident most clearly in 1(d). Equally this may be evidence of a centre effect, with some whole centre's responses to (d) lacking quality and quantity of sociological evidence. Centres are encouraged to attend the INSET courses in the autumn term and to pay particular attention to the quality and quantity of evidence used in student responses to part (d) in particular. It is also worth noting here that the most recent A2 text for this specification does provide quality evidence for the synoptic unit which may have been lacking in previous texts.

- 1 (a) This question posed very few problems for candidates. The vast majority could identify the working arrangements showing the smallest % difference between mothers and fathers as either job share, working from home or flexi-time. Candidates would have been rewarded for shift work or term time only if they referred to proportional differences, however very few candidates did this. To be rewarded the full 6 marks candidates had to use the numerical data from item A in their answer. Some candidates did not do this and failed to secure the full 6 marks. A significant minority of candidates confused the male and female columns and could not be fully rewarded as they had misread the chart.
- (b) Most candidates could identify two ways in which the ghost of Mrs Typical may influence a woman's life with reference to item B. The most popular influences were through working patterns, particularly part time work and taking career breaks. Some candidates wrote about less senior jobs and lower earnings which were both acceptable influences. Some candidates copied the sentences out referring to it being stranger and harder for them to insist that their husbands changed their working patterns or that they could not gain respect from their employers. Candidates who did this needed to use some of their own words rather than using verbatim illustrations to be awarded full marks.
- (c) The majority of candidates could cite one advantage and one disadvantage of using unstructured interviews although relatively few were able to link these to the research context of researching the employment experience of women who combine paid work with looking after their children. Those who did relate the methodological issue to the context referred to issues such as time constraints in the busy lives of women juggling childcare with employment and the length of time needed to carry out an unstructured interview. Other responses discussed the sensitivity of the issue meaning that women may give socially desirable answers for fear of being negatively portrayed or the importance of the social characteristics of the researcher in gaining valid data. A number of candidates seemed confused over validity and reliability, often writing sentences stating methodological issues such as building up a rapport which 'would increase validity and reliability...' then failing to explain how and why. The issue of a lack of research context has been a concern for a number of years and although slowly improving few candidates manage to secure the full 12 marks on this question. The following is an example of good practice on this question (it is a direct illustration from a script) and shows how a methodological advantage can be applied to the research context.

In an unstructured interview a rapport usually builds between the interviewer and the interviewee, this allows the women to be honest and open in their answers which increases the validity of the data collected. In these interviews the women should be able to talk freely about how difficult it is to balance paid employment with childcare responsibilities and to focus on what the difficulties are. This is important because the interviewer is unlikely to have thought of all of the problems before the interview and so allowing the woman freedom to talk helps to capture the experiences of how they juggle their roles first hand, for example through arranging their working hours around childcare issues.

- (d)** Answers to this question varied hugely. A surprising number of candidates wrote generalised accounts of female disadvantages, focusing on issues such as pay, maternity rights, lack of senior jobs and confinement to part time employment. Some of these answers contained little/no evidence but merely ideas. Clearly these responses were placed in level 1 or towards the bottom of level 2. The strongest candidates referred to a range of topics from the specification and cited evidence to back up the disadvantage faced by most women. There was excellent use of evidence from the EOC, Low Pay Unit. Concepts such as glass ceiling, segregated labour markets, double hump, triple shift, double jeopardy and the feminisation of poverty were well used. Evidence from writers such as Oakley, Walters, Walby, Leonard, Pahl, Lees, Glendining and Miller and Baxter appeared frequently. A number of candidates discussed pensions and benefits with success. Some referred to differences between the experiences of women from different ethnic minority backgrounds particularly in relation to unemployment rates and issues such as purdah. Overall this question did differentiate well between candidates however the number of generalised basic responses lacking sociological evidence was of concern.
- (e)** As above this question posed few problems for candidates and provided a full range of responses. The strongest responses provided detailed and wide ranging knowledge and understanding of feminist theoretical explanations for workplace inequalities. These answers located different branches of feminism and could identify evidence and concepts in support of each position. Many answers went beyond Liberal, Marxist and Radical feminism, into Black Feminist positions and Post/New feminisms. A significant number of responses provided lengthy accounts of Hakim and could place her work within a framework of choice and constraint. The mid range answers tended to either provide the theoretical accounts without the evidence to back it up, or to provide studies and concepts while neglecting the theoretical dimensions of feminism. The weakest answers and there were a number of them located feminism within one camp and proceeded to outline what their position was. With regard to evaluation, the strongest responses had an evaluative style and could provide specific evaluative commentary on studies and concepts. Many candidates used the Hakim debate as evaluation and some responses evaluated workplace inequalities through discussing the changing role of men and women in the workplace.

- 2 (a) This question posed few problems for candidates who could correctly identify the two main trends as the increase in the % of people identifying themselves as middle class, and the decrease identifying themselves as working class. In order to score full marks candidates needed to refer to the numerical evidence in the item. The only potential difficulty for some students was in their inability to use the heading from the graph clearly and consequently they wrote about the growth of the middle class, as opposed to the increase in the % of people assigning themselves to the middle class. Centres are advised to encourage students to note the headings used in graphs when answering data questions.
- (b) Almost all candidates identified 2 ways as being the work situation and the market situation. As in question 1(b) some candidates quoted directly from the item, students are advised to use their own words as well as those in the item. Some candidates identified inheritance, wealth and the small size of the upper class as differences too which were legitimate.
- (c) Candidates found the task of contextualising their answers easier to accomplish in this question than in 1(c), possibly due to the lack of a specified method on which to hinge their answer. Conversely a number of responses contextualised their response so much that they neglected to pinpoint the research difficulty that the question had asked for. The strongest answers wrote about problems such as operationalisation of the concept of class, accessing a wider enough sample or selecting an appropriate method that would measure the strength of a class identity without comprising the validity of the data gathered. A number of responses however became sidetracked into describing different classification schemes, arguing that class divisions were blurring and neglecting to identify the methodological difficulty that arose from this.
- (d) A number of responses to this question focused on anecdotal accounts of the upper class, describing the media images of the super rich compared to the aristocratic images of royalty. Clearly to be placed above level 1 candidates needed to go beyond this. Most responses discussed the difficulty of identifying the upper class as a distinct group due to emergence of the super rich which was a legitimate response. Concepts such as the old boy network, social closure, super rich, social, economic and cultural capital were well used in many answers. Empirical evidence from Scott, Adonis and Pollard and Giddens appeared in the stronger answers, although most candidates did not refer to studies. Some candidates confused the upper class with any class other than the working class this may have been a confusion emerging from a misunderstanding of Marxism.
- (e) Most candidates wrote generalised accounts of the Marxist theory of class difference and class change. The differentiating factor for these answers came from the quantity and quality of Marxist concepts used. The weakest responses knew little beyond polarisation and exploitation. The stronger answers were able to discuss class consciousness, infrastructure, surplus value etc. The strongest responses could differentiate between Marxist and neo Marxist explanations using concepts such as hegemony, ideological state apparatus and contradictory class locations. However, surprisingly few responses were able to demonstrate this level of understanding and most responses did not differentiate between traditional and neo Marxist theory. Evaluation on this question often came from the use of other theories such as functionalism and Weberiansim. The strongest responses commented on the thin line between neo Marxist and Weberian explanations of class change. Most candidates were able to offer some general points of evaluation on Marxism, such as the growth of the middle class or the failure of proletarian revolutions to bring about sustained class change. A significant minority of responses incorrectly thought Charles Murray was a Marxist writer and gave accounts of the underclass theory as Marxist.

**Advanced GCE Sociology: 3878/7878**

**June 2006 Assessment Series**

**Unit Threshold Marks**

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2532	Raw	60	45	41	37	33	29	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2533	Raw	90	64	57	50	43	37	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2534	Raw	60	42	38	34	30	26	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2535	Raw	90	74	67	60	53	46	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2536	Raw	60	44	39	34	29	25	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2537	Raw	60	44	39	35	31	27	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2538	Raw	60	44	39	35	31	27	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2539	Raw	90	66	59	52	45	38	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

**Specification Aggregation Results**

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
<b>3878</b>	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
<b>7878</b>	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
<b>3878</b>	18.7	37.1	58.7	76.7	89.5	100.0	7191
<b>7878</b>	16.1	40.0	66.6	87.4	97.3	100.0	5131

5131 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see;

[www.ocr.org.uk/OCR/WebSite/docroot/understand/ums.jsp](http://www.ocr.org.uk/OCR/WebSite/docroot/understand/ums.jsp)

Statistics are correct at the time of publication





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