GCE

Sociology

Advanced GCE **A2 7878**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS 3878**

Report on the Units

January 2007

3878/7878/MS/R/07J

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Advanced GCE Sociology (7878)

Advanced Subsidiary GCE Sociology (3878)

REPORT ON THE UNITS

Unit 2532: Individual and Society

This unit worked in a similar way to previous January sessions, with a similar size entry and mixture of candidates, with those re-sitting from the summer being assessed alongside those attempting the paper for the first time. Question two was slightly more popular than question one overall, although the difference was slight. The only question posing any kind of difficulty for candidates was 1(d) with the reference to new ethnic identities, which some candidates interpreted as being any new minority group migrating to the UK. These responses usually achieved some marks but found the issue of hybridity challenging and were struggling to achieve knowledge and evaluation marks.

There follows a question by question commentary on the workings of the paper.

Question

1 (a) Most candidates could identify and offer some explanation of the factors that affected Caryl Phillip's identity. The most common responses focussed on the process of migration from the Caribbean to England and the influence of growing up in a racist society. Some candidates used social class and others referred to the different educational experiences that he encountered. It is worth noting that some candidates became confused when they tried to link different factors together, which although not precluded is a higher order skill. Candidates are well advised to identify one factor and explain that factor only, before moving to another. Some of these responses lacked overall clarity and suggested that the candidates thought they needed to use the entire item in their answer, which they do not.

(b) This question was generally well answered. A minority of candidates offered features which were neither traditional or features of working class culture. Some referred to conspicuous consumption, others to living in suburban areas neither of which are features of traditional working class culture. The strongest responses focused on features such as solidarity, community and class consciousness. Evidence tended to come from concepts or from linking the feature identified to life in working class communities, sometimes through depiction in the media.

(c) The vast majority of candidates could identify two agents of socialisation and only a small minority seemed unaware of what these were. Most identified the family and wrote about norms and values being passed on through generations often linking this to tension and conflict between the home and the outside world. Reference was made to Ghuman and compartmentalism, Anwar and the clear sense of duty that many Pakistani children show towards their parents and Butler's work on Muslim women and life choices. Good sociology also emerged from answers based on the media, with references to studies such as Jhally but also to contemporary uses of the media in reinforcing ethnic identities through for example the Asian network and newspapers aimed at specific audiences, Eastern Eye and The Jung written in Urdu for example. Peer groups and the white mask and code switching was also used well, as of course was religion. This question posed few difficulties and the differentiator came in the form of the emphasis on the creation of ethnic identities and the quantity of evidence (particularly contemporary examples) offered.

(d)   This question produced the most interesting responses on the paper, and it was clearly a question that candidates had to think through in the exam. The strongest responses realised that new ethnic identities referred to processes of hybridisation, or the mixing and sharing of cultural practices rather than solely processes of migration. Studies such as Johal, Gillespie, Back and Gilroy were used well with the strongest responses working with the material and tailoring it to the concept of new ethnic identities. Some used code switching and white masks as evidence that new ethnic identities were not emerging because if they were there would be no need for code switching, others interpreted this as evidence that new identities must be in the process of emerging for code switching to be taking place. As either interpretation was acceptable, this became a good differentiator to see candidates having to work out what studies actually meant in relation to the question. The weakest responses interpreted new ethnic identities as meaning migration and immigration and clearly missed the point of change, emergence and hybridity.

2   (a)   The item posed no difficulty for candidates who were able to identify two findings from the survey mainly,the portrayal of men as the breadwinner and the statement that more men feeling comfortable crying/expressing emotion in front of their friends. The vast majority of answers identified both of these although other responses were permissible. In the explanation of the findings a number of candidates used the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and new man to distinguish between the findings which worked well, although responses could achieve the full marks by discussing traditional masculine roles without mentioning hegemonic masculinity. A common problem on this paper has always been the candidates who simply copy out the relevant sentences, or identity the answer and offer no explanation. The number of candidates doing this is certainly decreasing over time but it remains a significant differentiator.

      (b)   This question offered three types of responses. Firstly, those which identified features of traditional femininity and were able to provide clear sociological knowledge to illustrate the feature, in the form of a concept or study. For example identifying traditional femininity with beautification and referencing the beauty myth, or identifying the domestic and childcare role and referencing it to Parson's expressive roles. These responses achieved full marks. Secondly, and the most common type of response identified a feature and gave a partial explanation but could not link it to a clear piece of sociological evidence. For example identifying traditional femininity as having a caring/nurturing role and offering the explanation that women were good with children. Thirdly the type of response which misinterpreted the question and linked it to item A, or who offered features of femininity which are clearly not traditional. A good example is the ladettes who are clearly not traditional.

      (c)   This question was well answered and differentiated well on the basis on quantity and quality of evidence offered. Almost all candidates could offer two ways in which the media influenced gender roles. The most popular response was based on magazines with many strong responses focusing on Ferguson and McRobbie with Imelda Whelan's study of men's magazines appearing more frequently than in the past. Other responses focussed on beautification and used the beauty myth well. Mid range responses could cite relevant mediums but lacked the evidence to back up their argument. Evaluation came in the form of offering other agents of socialisation that played a role in the creation and reinforcement of gender roles and some responses chose to evaluate solely on the role of the media, discussing media effects or discussing changing gender roles in society and whether the media was indeed responsible.

(d) This question differentiated well although it did appear that some centres had a limited knowledge understanding of different types of masculinities. There may have been a centre effect in answering this question and indeed 1(d) where new ethnicities seemed to be grasped more fully by some centres than by others. Masculinities are clearly related to gender identities and the major textbooks all have sections dedicated to describing different types. The strongest responses were familiar with either Connell's work, focusing on hegemonic and complicit and then branching out into homosexual and new man, or Gilmour's work on men as 'providers, protectors and impregnators'. These candidates offered the conventional type of masculinity, almost as an ideal type and then used this to which to base the others, showing their knowledge and engagement with the question as they progressed. However a large number of candidates were not familiar with these studies/arguments and therefore resorted to writing about different types of men; hard, soft, gay, straight, lads, sporty, geeky and so on. Studies such as Mac and Ghaill and the crisis of masculinity often appeared, although was sometimes offered as a different type of masculinity, showing limited understanding of the concept. Evaluation was strongest in the responses which had a clear position to argue from, usually that masculinity has changed. The majority of candidates listed different types of masculinity and offered juxtaposed responses, which could not be placed in the top mark band. The most frequently cited men were David Beckham as a metrosexual, Liam Gallagher as a lad and Jamie Oliver who would be interested to hear that he swayed between laddism, new man and traits of homosexual masculinity too.

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 whose candidates almost all 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 few rubric errors, although, there appeared to be more this session than in previous years and this seemed to happen in particular centres where more than one candidate would make the mistake of answering only one question. Overall, this was the most common error with very few candidates 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 issues 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.

Teachers' 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 that were well informed sociologically but they used material that 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 these 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 evaluated 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.

Teachers' 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 should be encouraged to use key evaluative terms that signal that they are evaluating the evidence or the argument at that point eg '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.

Teachers' 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, sociological 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 quite well answered, although a number of candidates referred to the UK 50 years ago in terms of features relating to pre-industrial society. Better responses were able to use sociological evidence to develop an explanation, including reference to Postman, Beck, Burghes, child-centredness and changing gender roles. Some answers were focused more generally on family change rather than parent/child relationships. Some candidates were unable to clearly identify and explain two ways in depth or make use of sociological research evidence to back up their answers, and, as a result, a significant number of candidates were only awarded marks within the level 2 band.

 (b) This question was generally well answered. Most candidates were able to locate the view that the nuclear family is the ideal family within Functionalism and/or the New Right and select relevant counter-arguments. Better responses used a range of evidence to discuss alternative views including feminism, Marxism, radical psychiatry and other issues from the 'dark side' of the family. Some candidates lingered on issues surrounding family structure that tended to then drift away from the question. Weaker answers failed to develop the arguments in support of the view and countered the view with more anecdotal, underdeveloped points.

2 (a) Most candidates were able to identify two reasons but weaker answers often lacked more than brief explanation. Better answers typically referred to secularisation, the changing role of women in society, rising divorce rates and cohabitation as a prelude to marriage and developed these reasons with sociological evidence. There was also some good use of relevant statistical data. Weaker answers were anecdotal and would refer to issues like the expense of weddings without the use of data in support. A surprising number of candidates misunderstood the meaning of cohabitation and referred to student households or friends sharing a home together.

 (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 around women in the workplace but didn't develop their answer in terms of effect on family life, or did so in a perfunctory way, briefly referring to neglect of children or domestic tasks. Some candidates made judgements about whether change had been positive or negative without addressing its significance for family life. Better responses countered the view using a range of evidence to discuss the continuing hierarchy and inequality within society and the family and some candidates referred to differences in terms of ethnicity and social class.

OPTION 2 MASS MEDIA

3 (a) This question was generally well answered, typically using conceptual knowledge and understanding and some relevant examples in support of the explanations. Some candidates referred to horizontal and vertical integration but were confused about the differences between the two trends. A significant number of candidates seemed unclear about trends in ownership of the mass media and instead identified ways in which media production is developing.

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(b)   This question was quite well answered and better candidates used theoretical evidence from traditional and hegemonic Marxism and Pluralism to discuss the view. There was also some reference to concepts such as gate-keeping, agenda-setting and news values. There was, however, a tendency for candidates to produce rather generalised responses about media content rather than focus on constructing the content of the news. Weaker candidates were unclear about the definition of media professionals and typically referred to issues surrounding Rupert Murdoch with little development using sociological evidence.

4   (a)   This question was not generally well answered and candidates did not seem well prepared for this part of the specification. Even the better responses tended to be anecdotal, drawing on examples from the media that were only superficially explained. Very few responses reached the level 4 mark band and a large number were limited to level 2 because of lack of understanding about social class stereotypes.

(b)   This question produced a broad range of answers, including a good number of top band responses. Better candidates tended to include theory, concepts and studies in support of, and to counter, the view. Weaker answers were generally able to refer to sociological evidence but were more superficial or vague in their use of this evidence and were either wholly one-sided or had only limited balance.

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 characteristics, although some candidates identified two that overlapped to such a degree that only one characteristic could be credited. Better responses referred to a pick and mix approach, religious pluralism, secularisation or located the view within postmodernism. Weaker candidates seemed confused about the meaning of the term 'spiritual shopper' and produced vague responses that demonstrated little knowledge and understanding.

(b)   There was a range of responses to this question. Although it was not a popular question, there were some very strong responses that located the view within Marxism and cited relevant concepts and theories. Other answers were unclear about the term 'ideological control' and offered a confused response that was uncertain as to whether to locate the term within Marxism or functionalism, because of the link with social control.

6   (a)   This question produced a variety of responses. Some candidates were able to identify two characteristics and develop their points reasonably well, typically citing literal interpretation of sacred texts, opposition to modernity or high degree of engagement with religious life. Others did not understand the term religious fundamentalism and mistook it for functionalism, producing wholly inaccurate responses.

(b)   This question produced a range of responses, including some very well informed answers that used a range of sociological evidence to both support and counter the view. These answers drew on traditional material as well as more contemporary research. There was, however, a tendency to offer a more generalised account of the secularisation debate that lacked clear focus on the contemporary UK, as the question specified. Weaker answers were either too narrow or unbalanced.

OPTION 4 YOUTH AND CULTURE

7   (a)   This question was not generally well answered and many candidates appeared to have little knowledge of sociological research into this area. There were a number of superficial responses that cited truancy or disruptive behaviour as features but failed to support the points. Better answers typically referred to evidence such as Willis, Mirza or Mac an Ghaill.

    (b)   There were a range of responses to this question but a significant number of candidates produced generalised answers that offered little detailed knowledge. The more informed responses referred to a variety of factors including subject choice, gender socialisation, impact of labelling and differences in school subcultural experiences. Some candidates were able to evaluate the view by citing postmodern views or the impact of factors such as social class and ethnicity.

8   (a)   There were a range of responses to this question. Most candidates were able to offer relevant ways although a significant number were superficial and anecdotal. Candidates tended to refer to illustrative examples such as punks, skinheads or hippies but many did not support these with sociological evidence. Better candidates typically produced more theoretical and conceptual responses, for example, drawing on traditional material from Clarke, Cohen and Willis.

    (b)   There were few very strong answers to this question and a significant number of weaker responses that tended to be anecdotal, narrow and lacking in development. Most candidates attempted to address arguments both for and against the view but the points were often generalised and commonsensical. Better answers were able to offer some examples of research such as Hall and Gilroy in support of the view.

2534: Sociological research skills

General Comments

Overall, the quality of responses was similar to previous January sessions. Virtually all candidates answered every question part and responses demonstrate that candidates are becoming increasingly aware of the demands of each question and the assessment objectives involved in each question part. 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 failed to really engage with the context in a sustained way. In particular, poor responses were characterised by a lack of understanding of the basic research concepts required for questions (c) and (d) and there 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 weaker candidates who either throw all the concepts in together, or leave them out completely. There is evidence of improved understanding of the difference between the terms reliability, validity and representativeness, although explanations as to *why* a particular research method tends to generate more valid or reliable results were often lacking.

The other characteristic of weaker responses was in the lack of contextualisation where candidates offered 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 in part (d) questions as they 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.

Teacher's Tip
Use past papers to give candidates plenty of examination practice. This unit is structured in a very specific format and candidates would benefit from practising the exact requirements of each question part.

Comments on Individual Questions

1 (a) The majority of candidates demonstrated an awareness of the concept 'primary data' and there were very few who failed to score any marks for this question. The better answers offered a clear and succinct definition, referring to research being carried out by the researcher *first hand*. The best responses displayed a range of knowledge and understanding of the term by making reference to examples of research using primary data and disadvantages or advantages of using primary data. The vast majority of candidates offered a core definition, followed by an appropriate example. Few candidates scored the full 6 marks and candidates need to be aware that to be rewarded for a 'range' of knowledge and understanding of a concept, they need to offer some explanation and not just a one-sentence definition. A smaller number of candidates failed to understand the meaning of the concept; candidates should not be encouraged to see this question as one about key concepts in general. Despite the question asking about primary data, there were a number of candidates who includes validity and reliability in their answers which were not relevant.

(b)   The majority of candidates were able to successfully interpret the data and identify two main differences. Most candidates were able to correctly analyse the data in terms of stating the relevant percentages of males compared to females for the selected main differences, gaining six marks in total. Many also stated the difference between these percentages to obtain full marks for interpretation and analysis. A sizeable minority of candidates gained zero marks because instead of selecting and analysing main differences of the data, they either attempted to explain the reasons for the differences or gave general broader trends, rather than highlighting specific data. The majority of candidates are still failing to address the scale of change or, if they do, it is inaccurate; a common mistake was to state the percentage difference as a percentage *increase*, without stating it is a percentage *point* increase, or by wrongly assuming that the numerical figure was raw numbers of people rather than as percentages. 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 offered elaborate responses which make it difficult for examiners to identify the key points to reward.

> **Teacher's Tip**
> *Candidates should be encouraged to state "The first main difference is …" and start the second main difference as a clearly separate point.*

(c)   The vast majority of candidates correctly identified one strength and one weakness and were able to offer some explanations of these. A small minority identified relevant strengths/weaknesses but failed to explain them. A large number of candidates are not spending enough time on this question. A 16 mark question required more than a two-sentence answer.

AO1

As well as clearly identifying both a strength and weakness, many candidates were able to reference an appropriate key concept in their explanations. Many also offered enough detailed expansion of their answer to confirm full AO1 marks for either or one of the strength/weakness. Oddly, many candidates seemed capable of achieving full marks for just one; either the strength or the weakness, and gaining just the 2 marks (for the identification and explanation only) for the second. A number of candidates misinterpreted the stimulus material and attempted to explain why having the teachers administer the *structured questionnaire* to the students was either a strength or a weakness. A number of candidates attempted to identify and explain strength and weakness in terms of *key concepts*, but this is quite a complex task and only a small minority of the more able candidates did this successfully. Similarly, some candidates attempted to explain the strength of using *method triangulation*, and a few produced high quality answers, explaining in detail how *both* reliability and validity were enhanced. But, many who tried this did not fully explain their answer, simply stating that either reliability or validity were 'improved' without explaining how or why.

There were some very strong answers commenting on the *group interviews*, producing good AO1 marks (whether as a strength or a weakness); triggering consideration of validity/truthful and detailed 'relaxed' responses (strength) or lack of it because of peer influence/embarrassment etc (weakness) and or issues of reliability (lack of). 'Representativeness' of the sample caused some confusion, along with 'ethics'. However, some candidates easily gained full AO1 marks for indicating the weakness of the sample selected and lack of representativeness.

In general, those candidates who selected methods as the strength/weakness tended to be able to handle the demands of the question better than those selecting other research issues, and gained 8 AO1 marks.

AO2a

This section provided more of a challenge for candidates to gain the marks. Most candidates easily gained appropriate identification and explanation marks, but few referenced the context of the research ('why young people binge drink') and, given the previous reports which have highlighted this lack of referencing and the fact that there were 3 references to the context in the actual question, it was disappointing to see so many candidates failing to mention it at all in their answers. Very few candidates were able to refer to the context (binge drinking) and the aims of the research in their answers (why young people are binge drinking).

> ***Teacher's Tip***
> *Give students past question (c)'s and then (b)'s 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.*

(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 (the most common ones being a form of questionnaire or interview) 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 chose sampling frames which included a measure of social class (for example, occupation in the census). However, very few candidates successfully addressed the issue of social class and a large number of candidates did not have any understanding of what social class was or how it could be operationalised.

> ***Teacher's Tip***
> *Get students to apply their knowledge and understanding of sampling techniques by asking them how they would get different samples; eg elderly people, students, middle class, minority ethnic groups.*

Most candidates focused on questionnaires, 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 were therefore superficial. 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 offered confused/inaccurate references to key research concepts. 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 or contextualisation. A large number of candidates offer a generalised answer or weak understanding of the context (see previous comments of the difficulty of assessing social class). Some centres had clearly given candidates a rehearsed answer which was weak in terms of addressing the key concepts – many of these are still 'throwing in' all the concepts together which really do not display any understanding of what they mean.

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.

Many of the Reports submitted for moderation this January were re-submissions but there are also a growing number of centres that entered their 1st year candidates for this unit in the January session. There were very many Reports of an excellent standard, candidates were able to discuss, analyse and evaluate their chosen study in a confident and mature manner. In these Reports technical terminology was used accurately and methodological concepts were explicitly applied to the context of the chosen studies.

Nevertheless, there are still 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

Despite the submission date of 10th of January being very close to the beginning of term the vast majority of centres submitted their MS1 forms, and where appropriate the Reports, by this date. Centres who failed to meet the deadline should note that the submission date remains constant from one year to the next.

The Centre Authentication Form continues to slow the moderation process for a minority of centres. It is now a requirement that this form is included with any work submitted for moderation, without this form candidates may not receive their results. It would be appreciated if centres that have to be reminded to forward the CAF could return a signed form by return of post.

Far fewer clerical errors were noted this session. Once again the prompt return of any correspondence would be appreciated.

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

Details of internal standardisation were received from most centres where this was necessary. All centres that have more than one person assessing the Reports need to be reminded to include details of the procedures used for internal standardisation, either on the reports or in a separate letter.

The very few centres that produced an invalid rank order responded quickly to requests to amend the marks for some candidates in order to produce an accurate rank order.

The majority of candidates now word process their Reports. Once again there were some centres that continue to submit the Reports on loose sheets of paper – sometimes not even stapled together. All Reports should be submitted in the answer book, which 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 mark scheme was applied consistently and accurately across all Assessment Objectives in the majority of centres. When there was a problem it was usually due to an over lenient interpretation of the mark scheme. 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.

The majority of candidates are now making explicit references to the key concepts in section (c) and (d). Nevertheless many need to develop these references to justify being awarded marks in the higher mark band eg candidates will often refer to unstructured interviews as being valid but not reliable without explicitly developing their comments. Reliability is the concept, which continues to cause problems for many candidates.

It is pleasing to note that the majority of centres submit Reports with detailed comments on the front covers and annotation on the Reports themselves. These comments are very useful to the moderator in ascertaining how the mark scheme has been applied, especially when they are directly linked to the Mark Scheme in terms of Assessment Objectives and key concepts. All centres should adopt this good practice. Comments which address the candidate, rather than the moderator are generally unhelpful. All assessors should ensure that comments are an accurate reflection of the candidates' work and that the mark scheme is studied in detail in order to ensure that it is applied correctly.

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. On the other hand candidates who do not use the full word allocation are penalising themselves as they often fail to develop their points in an explicit manner.

Academic matters

Many Centres should be congratulated for ensuring that their candidates report on a variety of contemporary research/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. Once again this is to be encouraged as candidates can share their knowledge and understanding of the study/research thus enhancing the collective experience of the group.

However some centres continue to use material that can disadvantage their candidates, especially research that is either medical or psychological.

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)

Most candidates were able to write an accurate 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.

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. This was usually the section that weaker candidates found most challenging.

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. Other candidates quoted the appendix without attempting any analysis of the findings. The few candidates who made 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 that 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.

Principal Examiner's Report

2536 Power and Control January 2007

General Comments

The overall standard was similar to June 2006 and January 2006. Most candidates performed to a good standard and displayed a wide ranging knowledge base with a sound understanding of studies and concepts. The majority of candidates were able to apply this knowledge to the options they had selected although sometimes this tended towards a generalised approach to the topic rather than to the specifics of the question set. This particularly applied to the application of theory to the questions where many candidates displayed a general understanding of theories but did not explain how the theory related to the particular question.

This generalised knowledge was also in evidence with the application of historical knowledge and understanding which added very little to the analysis of the particular issues relating to the question. This historical knowledge was particularly present in responses to questions on health, education and social policy where developments in the 1940s were often described in considerable detail but with a lack of application to the demands of the particular question.
Differences <u>within</u> perspectives still caused problems for some candidates in this session with Marxism and feminism being common examples of the failure to acknowledge developments and differences within broad perspectives. Where a particular perspective or explanation was highlighted in the question, some candidates referred to any sociologist they could remember and related them to the perspective. This was most noticeable in question 1 on realism.

Some candidates were able to describe a very wide range of studies and writers but often this detracted from their analysis of this material given the time constraints of the exam. This meant that they did not achieve as highly as their knowledge deserved as they were not able to explain the significance of the material selected in sufficient depth. Candidates should be encouraged to consider exactly <u>why</u> they are including a particular study in relation to the actual question set.

There was less entirely tangential material in this session with most candidates applying their knowledge and understanding to the question. A minority of candidates missed key words or phrases in the question, however, and therefore only addressed the specifics of the question now and again. This was particularly true in question 2 where labelling was often described accurately but the role of the police was only briefly addressed by some candidates. This suggests an element of 'question spotting' where pre-rehearsed material was applied regardless of the demands of the question. Many candidates, however, were able to apply their material to the specifics of the question in a sustained way.

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…..'

Often local knowledge was displayed which demonstrated a thoughtful application of material to the question. This can be helpful in drawing out social policy differences, for example between England and Wales. However, often the examples were not sourced and became impressionistic.

There remains a tendency for candidates to use relevant material in terms of statistical evidence but to fail to source the evidence. This was particularly the case in relation to question 4 on gender differences in educational achievement.

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.

The responses of some candidates were unbalanced with more material not addressing the specifics of the question than material which did. Sometimes this material could have been utilised to evaluate but was not explicitly used in this way and therefore became tangential.

Positive evaluation was more evident this session with stronger responses indicating how more recent studies support a more dated theory or concept or study.

Candidates should be encouraged to evaluate throughout their responses rather than the, still too common, leaving of evaluation to the end of essays. Weaker responses tended towards assertion and opinion in terms of evaluation with a lack of supporting evidence or theory.

Stronger responses used their conclusions to suggest further areas for research and to demonstrate possible gaps in sociological knowledge or the dated nature of sociological explanations given contemporary trends or events.

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!

The length of some introductions created problems for some candidates who otherwise demonstrated a sound knowledge which they were able to apply to the question but then ran out of time. This was particularly evident in over-long descriptions of the difference between crime and deviance in questions 1 and 2.

Candidates should continue to be encouraged to proof-read their essays as many simple errors could be eradicated, for example confusing right and left realism in question 1 when often it appeared to be merely a slip of the pen!
Most candidates appeared to have utilised the full hour and there were very few rubric errors.

The most popular questions were, again, 1, 2, 3 and 4 with a large majority of candidates attempting these options, namely Education or Crime and Deviance.

Comments on individual questions

1 This was a popular question and generally well answered. Weaker responses wrote generally about explanations of crime and deviance without addressing the nature of realist explanations. There were some unbalanced responses with a much greater emphasis on one approach (usually right realism). Some weaker responses were unable to attribute particular writers to the correct version of realism. Most candidates were able to describe concepts in an accurate way, for example 'zero tolerance'. On occasions, candidates failed to use opportunities to evaluate by simply writing about left realism and then describing right realism without relating them to each other.

Strong responses were evident, however, with accurate explanations of realism and thorough analysis and evaluation. Policy issues were discussed thoughtfully by a minority of candidates, for example the extent to which New Labour has been influenced by different aspects of realist approaches.

2 Also a popular question. A common problem with responses to this question was to write generally about labelling, with particular reference to the media featuring strongly with a lack of emphasis on the police. There was a tendency among some candidates to explain labelling in considerable detail. (for example Lemert's work) without applying the theory to the police. Weaker responses tended to assume the police label, for example, the working class without any supporting evidence. Too often, responses were at a commonsensical, impressionistic level.

Many candidates, however, were able to focus on the police and utilised evidence in relation to gender, ethnicity and social class in their responses. There was often, in addition, a relevant use of policy developments to address the question, for example, the use of ASBOs.

3 This was also a popular question, however not as popular as question 4.

Many candidates demonstrated an impressive knowledge of theory, particularly Marxism and functionalism but often this was over-generalised with a lack of focus on the issue of culture. Concepts were generally used well, for example the hidden curriculum and cultural capital.

Sometimes evaluative opportunities were missed with a description of a theory being followed with another theory but without linking the two. Many responses concentrated entirely on social class and culture and therefore overlooked issues relating to ethnicity and gender.

Some otherwise strong responses drifted into lengthy discussions relating to the role of the media (particularly in terms of the ideological state apparatus with, consequently, a lack of attention to the role of schools).
Many responses, however, demonstrated a sophisticated analysis and evaluation of theories with the application of relevant studies to support or criticise the theoretical positions.

4 A very popular question. Most candidates displayed a sound knowledge of gender differences in education achievement. There was a tendency to confuse historical periods in this question, however, with some candidates referring to 'in the past' or 'in the old days' without being more specific. Statistics in relation to achievement were frequently utilised but not sources.

Many candidates focussed more extensively on explanations relating to general social processes rather than on processes within schools. This led to unbalanced responses.

Often responses were assertive and impressionistic with common statements such as 'girls are more organised', 'girls are better at coursework' with a lack of supporting evidence.

Some candidates relied too heavily on quite dated material and focussed on why females are disadvantaged and therefore 'underachieve'!

There were many strong responses to this question, however, with a wide ranging and detailed knowledge and understanding and a clear analysis of relevant material. Stronger responses were highly evaluative with the use of material relating to social class and ethnicity to examine the debate around gender.

5   This was not a particularly popular question although there were some strong responses indicating a wide ranging knowledge of developments in health care provision. Some candidates, however, wrote generalised accounts of inequalities in health and illness without relating these to health care provision.

6   This was more popular than question 5 and generally better answered. Sometimes there was a greater emphasis on the assessment of the bio-mechanical model with very little explanation of what the model actually is.

On occasions evaluation was implicit with descriptions of alternative models but a failure to explicitly use these models to evaluate the bio-mechanical one.

There was also a tendency in weaker responses to make assertions, for example about doctor-patient relationships, without supporting evidence. Stronger responses demonstrated a sound understanding of the development of the bio-mechanical model and were highly evaluative using a range of studies and critiques of the model.

7   Very few responses to this question. Strong responses demonstrated an impressive knowledge of the nature of identity and the link with the culture industries. Some responses tended towards assertion and impression, however, with a general discussion about culture with a lack of reference to theory or studies.

8   Again, not a popular question. Most candidates were able to discuss different types of culture with a degree of confidence although often this was in the form of juxtaposition without really focussing on the issue of inferiority.

9   Few responses to this question. Most candidates who attempted it had a good knowledge and understanding of 'third way' models and were able to utilise concepts such as 'social exclusion' in a confident way. Some candidates, however, wrote generalised accounts of the development of the welfare state without sufficiently focussing on the 'third way'.

10   Again, not a popular question. Candidates attempting this question generally displayed a sound knowledge of the debate with the main focus being on New Right theory. Weberianism was less well developed, on the whole. Critiques of underclass theory, mainly from a Marxist perspective, were generally well developed.

Weaker responses tended (as in question 9) towards a generalised account of the development of the welfare state.

11 This question was generally answered well, with more responses on this topic area (together with Question 12) than in previous sessions. Candidates generally displayed a sound knowledge and understanding of new social movements and issues of identity. Theory was generally well understood and often candidates were able to discuss particular social movements to apply to the question. There were few weak responses to this question although some candidates failed to focus sufficiently on 'identity'.

12 Most candidates who attempted this demonstrated a good understanding of the nature of direct action and were able to relate this to issues of disadvantage. Concepts related to disadvantage such as marginalisation were often used well and theoretical understanding was generally good. Weaker responses tended towards generalised discussions around political action without relating these discussions to the issue of disadvantage.

2537: Applied Sociological Research Skills

General comments

The number of candidates taking this module rose slightly compared to last January. The standard of responses was good; many candidates had been well prepared and demonstrated an excellent understanding of research design, producing some very thoughtful responses. The vast majority of candidates attempted all parts of the question and in doing so demonstrated their understanding of the skills required by each of the parts. There were a few, generally weaker candidates, who had not allocated their time according to the guidance on the paper and in particular did not spend as long as they should have on part (e). This is worth 22 marks and centres should advise candidates that they ought to spend a minimum of 30 minutes on this part in order to produce a wide ranging and detailed response. As always 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).

Most candidates engaged with the theme of the paper and were able to address the context outlined in the research brief in ITEM B although there were still some generalised 'catch all' answers. It was the ability to contextualise parts (d) and (e) that proved to be one of the differentiators this session.

> **Teacher's Tip**
> *Ensure candidates understand all parts of the research process and practice, using past papers, putting the different parts of the process into a range of contexts.*

Comments on individual parts of the question

Part (a)

Most candidates were able to identify that a low response rate and the uncertainty of who was completing the questionnaires were the two problems of postal questionnaires highlighted in ITEM A. Most of them included accurate data from the item to support their point, although a few thought the number of responses was 54% (33% plus 21%). However not all of the candidates who correctly identified the two problems were able to analyse them. For example they did not relate a low response rate to a reduced sample size and therefore a potential lack of representativeness or uncertainty of whom had completed the questionnaires to a possible lack of validity. The marks for part (a) are for interpretation and analysis and candidates are expected to make an analytic point.

There were a number of candidates who considered the problems of postal questionnaires without reference to ITEM A and despite their obvious knowledge and understanding could not be awarded any marks for this.

> **Teacher's Tip**
> *Use part (a)s from past questions and practice analysing the issue being asked about.*

Part (b)

One of the differentiators in this session was the ability of candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the advantages of a pilot study and to contextualise it in relation to the musical tastes of young people as required by this part of the question. This ability to contextualise their responses continues to be a skill that eludes many candidates and consequently many of them are throwing two marks away. Some candidates thought this part of the question was somehow related to ITEM A despite the fact the context was musical taste and therefore quite distinct from the research data in ITEM A. There were also a number of candidates who, rather surprisingly, had no idea what a pilot study was. Centres are advised that this part of the question could ask candidates about any aspect of research design and therefore they should be familiar with the whole process. A lot of candidates wasted time by providing a definition of a pilot study at the start of their answer. Stronger candidates went straight to the specifics of the question identifying and explaining one advantage and then doing the same for a second. The most common advantages were being able to do a test run of questions to be used in order to ensure respondents could understand them, checking that terminology concerning aspects of musical taste were clear, testing the sampling technique to ensure that when the full blow study was done the researcher would be able to access the people they wanted to.

> **Teacher's Tip**
> *After practising all past questions students could, as an exercise, think of contemporary issues relating to the topic they are studying for 2536 or to inequality and difference for the synoptic unit and consider how they would link that issue to various parts of a research design.*

Part (c)

Although this part of the question should enable all candidates to pick up marks some lost them by simply describing what they saw, often without supporting what they said with accurate statistics. Stronger candidates interpreted and analysed the data using terms such as highest, lowest, differences, similarities and so on. In addition they made comparisons and identified patterns and trends. Some weaker candidates appeared to rush in without reading the data carefully consequently they either misunderstood who had completed the survey or misread the statistics as numbers not percentages. Some candidates wasted time making assumptions about the data and some, often the same weaker candidates, wasted time summarising the research process not the findings.

Only a small minority of candidates attempted to play around with the data and in so doing made mathematical errors. There is no need to do any 'fancy maths' the task is to summarise the findings and candidates should know that this means they should cover all of the data and in doing so use accurate statistics from the table to support what they are saying. Most candidates used the data in the text and the table although found it more difficult to analyse the data in the text than in the table and often ended up simply 'lifting' the three points.

> **Teacher's Tip**
> *Candidates should look for contemporary data relevant to the other two A2 papers and practise summarising it fully. This could be done as a class exercise/competition asking students in turn to identify a point 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)

Many candidates were well prepared for this part of the question and demonstrated a good understanding of the research process however as with part (b) it was the ability of candidates to contextualise their design that proved to be the discriminator between the strong candidates who understood they had to consider the extent to which girls were involved in informal music making in their local area and how much of it went on and those who ignored some or all of this context. Those who partially contextualised their responses tended to focus on girls in the local area and ignored informal music making. It is difficult for candidates to justify their design if they do not focus on the context. They end up with a generalised design that could be applicable to anything rather than the specifics of the brief outlined in ITEM B. Many candidates recognised the importance of linking their research design to theory but quite often did it by either starting with a general paragraph or adding one on at the end. Better candidates linked the theory to the context.

Most students chose appropriate methods usually either questionnaires using closed questions or structured interviews and were then able to justify why they had chosen the particular method. The ability to justify each stage of their design distinguished the stronger candidates from the weaker ones who tended to mechanistically describe the process without justifying any of it or linking it at each stage to the context. For example candidates would say I need to operationalise concepts and then did not say how they would do that.

Most candidates realised that an integral part of the research process is the ability of the researcher to access the group they want to research and were able to address this issue together with who the relevant gate-keepers might be. They were also able to consider appropriate sampling strategies and sample size. Many made it easy for themselves by deciding to conduct their research in their own schools and colleges. Weaker candidates tended to go for more convoluted strategies that is if they addressed sampling at all. There are still too many candidates confusing a sampling frame with the sample. The brief asked for an appropriate sample and although most decided to opt for a representative sample deeming that to be most appropriate a few decided to focus more directly on girls and were rewarded for that.

Candidates are aware of the importance of using the key methodological concepts to justify various parts of the process but many use them imprecisely and/or without clarity, often linking them all together in a way that demonstrates a complete lack of knowledge and understanding.

Teacher's Tip
Students to be given short extracts of research relevant to other modules and to discuss in pairs the impact of the key concepts on the quality of the data collected and the research design. They can then use then as an evaluative point in those exams.

Part (e)

The majority of candidates were able to identify a range of weaknesses and some appropriate solutions. As with part (d) there was a tendency by some candidates to do a largely unrelated, in terms of context, theory paragraph at the start. For some reason many assumed all respondents will automatically tell lies when completing a questionnaire or being interviewed.
Triangulation was often used as a panacea to all weaknesses frequently without explanation.
Some candidates discussed solutions leaving it to the examiner to work out what the weakness was. The best responses accurately and explicitly discussed ways in which the key concepts impacted on the research design and the quality of data collected.

Some candidates who had perhaps studied other social sciences spent too long talking about ethics in terms of harming the individual and their own safety and that of the individual which merely served to highlight their lack of understanding of the context.

A few candidates repeated what they had said in (d). Part (e) is intended to enable the candidate to evaluate their research design and to explain and develop that evaluation.

Teacher's Tip
Give students a range of weaknesses and then in pairs or small groups ask them to identify a solution and then develop it in relation to a key concept and to a context.

Unit 2539: Social Inequality and Difference

Although it has a relatively small entry this unit has a changing and eclectic pattern of entry. There has been an increase in the number of smaller centres attempting this examination for the first time and a large number of these candidates did not appear to be prepared for synoptic assessment. This was evident by the proportion of candidates who offered very brief responses to part (e) questions or to a number who offered no response at all to these questions. Most noticeable within these centres was the number of candidates who did not know what a cultural explanation of poverty was. While there are no rules preventing the early entry for the synoptic paper teachers should consider the long term consequences of entering whole classes for an examination at a stage where they are unprepared.

Neither question was more or less popular this session. There follows a question by question commentary on the workings of the paper.

1   (a)   The table posed few difficulties for students who knew that a trend meant something that occurred over time. A number of candidates missed this point and wrote about ownership of wealth in one year only, clearly misinterpreting the question. Some candidates did not use the data in the table to support their answer, stating that ownership of wealth for the top 1% had 'increased', these answers were awarded a mark but they needed numerical reference to be awarded the full marks.

     (b)   Almost all candidates correctly identified the consequences of living in poverty from the item. The differentiation came from the use they made of the data in the item. For example some candidates stated that one consequence was having a poor diet, this is correct and was awarded a mark. To achieve full marks they needed to refer to the cause of the poor diet being a lack of money ('we can't afford it'), with the strongest answers making reference to the doctor's role too. A small number of candidates wrote about consequences of poverty that were not in the item, they did not achieve any marks as the question clearly directs a use of the item.

     (c)   Almost all candidates could offer two methodological difficulties associated with measuring poverty in the contemporary UK. The most popular response was based on the difficulties of operationalising poverty. The strongest of these clearly stated why this was a methodological problem, relating it to definitions and measurements. A large number of candidates however became side tracked into explaining Rowntree, Townsend and Mack and Lansley's work and ended up neglecting the question which could have been answered without reference to any of these. Other popular responses were based around finding a suitable sample of respondents, particularly due to the sensitive nature of the topic and also selecting a suitable method, discussing how questionnaires may be the most suitable for a sensitive topic such as poverty but that they were likely to depend on the objective measure of poverty offered by the researcher which may differ from the respondents views.

     (d)   The most popular social groups to appear were some ethnic minority groups, children, women, elderly, those with disabilities and some social classes. The strongest responses dealt with four groups (three was sufficient for 'wide ranging') and offered some detailed evidence for each group in the form of a study, statistics and/or concepts. Many however identified a range of groups but offered very little evidence in support of their answer. Comments such as, 'the elderly live in poverty because they don't work and live on pensions' frequently appeared and while this may be true at this level we would expect some detail on the groups being identified.

Women were often referenced as being likely to live in poverty because so many of them are single parents, as with the first case there is an element of truth in the statement but it is also generalising on a huge scale. On ethnicity the strongest responses could identify which groups were prone to living in poverty, linking this to evidence from unemployment statistics, or studies such as Bhopal's home workers. The weakest responses assumed that all ethnic minority groups were likely to live in poverty and referenced this to racism.

(e) There was huge variation in responses to this question. A significant number did not know what a cultural explanation of poverty is and could not/did not answer the question. Another group of students wrote solely about definition of relative and absolute poverty and offered material that was tangential to the question. Of those who did understand the question (about half those who attempted it) the strongest focused on theories of the New Right and could differentiate between the views of Murray and Marsland. Most of these referenced Lewis and the culture of poverty theories. Evaluation came in the form of offering the structural explanations associated with Marxism and Weberianism. Strong responses used Craine and Blackman well, with some offering the integrated approaches of Piachard and LeGrand as a way of concluding their discussion. Some candidate appeared to understand the cultural explanations but became confused when they attempted to link it to agency and choice. The assumption being that cultural explanations involve the exercise of agency and structural explanations don't. However when they tried to illustrate this with evidence they confused the notion of norms and values being passed on from generation to generation (associated with cultural explanations) with individuals having no choice and being unable to exercise agency. While we had sympathy with these students they may be better advised to stick to either agency/structure or culture/structure as a clearer, albeit more limiting dichotomy.

2 (a) As with question one this posed no problem for the candidates who understood what a trend was, and that they needed to make reference to the numerical data in the item in support of their answer.

(b) This posed a challenging item for candidates and consequently a number of candidates simply lifted the relevant sentences form the item and offered them as their answer. More candidates strayed outside of the item in answering this question too, offering issues such as the Equal Pay Act as a way in which patriarchy had changed. There may have been some implicit reference to the item in these responses but it needs to be explicit that the answer refers to the information in item B.

(c) Official statistics proved a challenge for a number of candidates, who struggled with the methodological problems associated with using them, as they were unclear on how they are collected. This issue alone could be offered as a problem of using them however when candidates try to explain this they stray from the question. A number of candidates suggested that if informal interviews were used to collect the statistical data they may lack reliability and generalisability. This line of thought took them away from answering the actual question and a number did not seem to realise that a qualitative method of data collection would not be used for collecting government statistics which are quantifiable. The strongest responses focused on the lack of validity offered by official statistics making it impossible to research the reasons for women's position in the workforce, another popular concern was the existence of the hidden economy which meant that not all women in the workforce were paid as official employees. Teachers are well advised to spend more time considering how official statistics are collected and complied as a number of strong candidates struggled with this question.

(d)   This question differentiated well between responses with only a minority choosing not to/being unable to attempt it. Evidence was most readily drawn from the topics of education, crime, workplace, and home. Concepts and issues such as the crisis of masculinity, breadwinner roles, educational underachievement, custodial sentencing, stop and search, paternity leave, Fathers for Justice, de-skilling, post fordism, positive discrimination and marginalisation were referred to. Studies such as MacDonald and Marsh, Willis, Sewell, Mac an Ghaill appeared. Clearly this was a question that candidates had to think through in the examination and the quantity of evidence available may have been less than in 1(d), however allowance was made for this in the application of the mark scheme and it did differentiate well.

(e)   This question posed no noticeable difficulties for candidates who had a wealth of evidence to draw from and issues and concerns to discuss. Most candidates based their responses on inequalities in the workplace focussing on income and promotion and in the in the home focusing on dual roles and responsibilities. They then selected from the topics they had studied during the course and used media, religion, poverty and crime particularly effectively. Theoretically the strongest responses used a range of feminist and post feminist explanations, Marxism and functionalism. Concepts such as the dual labour market, reserve army of labour, glass ceiling, concrete ceiling, dual burden, triple shift, beautification, and sexualisation were commonly found. Some responses did not include theoretical references which made evaluation marks particularly difficult to achieve as they had little to base alternative explanations on. The differentiation in this question came from the quantity and quality of evidence used in the answers.

Advanced GCE Sociology (3878/7878)

January 2007 Assessment Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2532	Raw	60	45	40	35	30	26	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2533	Raw	90	66	58	51	44	37	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2534	Raw	60	42	38	34	31	28	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	43	38	33	29	25	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2537	Raw	60	47	42	37	33	29	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2539	Raw	90	67	59	51	44	37	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
3878	300	240	210	180	150	120	0

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
7878	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see;
http://www.ocr.org.uk/exam_system/understand_ums.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

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