GCE

Sociology

Advanced GCE A2 **H581**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS **H181**

OCR Report to Centres June 2015

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Advanced GCE Sociology (H581)

Advanced Subsidiary GCE Sociology (H181)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

G671 Exploring Socialisation, Culture and Identity

General Comments:

This session, once again, saw a wide range of candidate performance, and overall, candidate performance has improved with an increase in the mean mark. It is pleasing to note that increasing numbers of candidates are responding accurately to the question stem instructions. For example, question 2 will always ask for "two ways/ types/ features" and many candidates plan their answer into two distinct paragraphs, citing "the first way...." followed by "a second way..." There were very few rubric errors and the vast majority of candidates attempted to answer all four questions which indicate that the questions were clear and accessible to all. The majority of candidates allocated their time appropriately, recognising, for example, that since question 4 has half the marks for the exam paper, they should be spending half the time (45 minutes) answering this question. Compared to previous sessions, it was noticeable that a large number of candidates struggled to answer question (2) in an accurate, sociological way and lacked knowledge and understanding of sociological evidence about religion as an agency of socialisation. There is a more detailed commentary on this question in the section below.

It may be useful once again to clarify the role and purpose of the pre-release material. The pre-release material is specifically related to question (4) on the examination paper, as this question contains the instruction "using the pre-release material…". The focus of question (4) is always on sociological methods and the research process and the aim of this question is to enable students to discuss methodological issues in the context of a piece of contemporary research focused on culture and/or identity and/or socialisation (the pre-release material). The other three questions on the examination paper aim to test candidates on the specification content from this unit, which is outlined clearly and explicitly under seven key issues in the specification content. That is not to say, however, that the pre-release material can *only* be used for question (4). As the instructions on the front of the examination paper state*: "You may interpret and apply the pre-release material as well as your own sociological knowledge for any question, wherever it is relevant and appropriate".* This is because the pre-release material is based around research into culture, socialisation and identity, which means that in any other questions (1-3) asking about these areas students may wish to draw upon the pre-release as a piece of sociological evidence. It may happen, as it did this session, that the pre-release material could be referred to in questions 1 and question 3: For question 1, candidates could make references to norms associated with being a father; and forquestion 3 the pre-release material could be used to support or evaluate the view that traditional masculinity no longer exists. Of course, candidates who rely on the pre-release material as their <u>only</u> source of evidence are not going to score highly, as they will fail to display the 'wide range' of knowledge and understanding which is required for the top band. In other sessions, there may not be so many links to the pre-release material in questions 1, 2 or 3 and students will need to be able to draw on a range of sociological evidence.

With every question, in order to achieve marks in the highest mark band, candidates need to include a range of sociological evidence and to discuss these in some depth. A large number of responses, particularly for questions (2) and (3), failed to include the required range and depth of sociological evidence. "Evidence" can include studies, theories, concepts and contemporary examples, although it should be noted that responses which rely heavily on contemporary examples will not score very highly as contemporary examples on their own are not good sociology. It is also worth noting that there is a difference between contemporary examples and anecdote. Contemporary examples mean events in society that can inform sociology but may not have been formally researched or studied; or events that are happening as sociologists are carrying out their research. For example, some candidates used the examples of religious

practice and belief for question 2 and / or examples of different types of masculinity in question 3. Anecdotal evidence, on the other hand, is bordering on 'common sense' knowledge and this is not rewarded in the examination; for example, claims that "muslim women wear the hijab because they are controlled by men". Responses which were wide-ranging in their use of sociological studies, in questions (2) and (3) tended to score highly and there are some examples of good practice in specific individual question section below.

Most candidates allocated the use of time effectively, spending the longest on question 4, which is worth just over half marks of the whole paper. There is some evidence that question (4) responses have improved in quality since the start of this unit. However, some candidates did experience timing issues; most commonly by spending too much time on question 1 which should be allocated approximately five minutes, or by spending too long on question 4 at the expense of the other three questions. There is some evidence that, where candidates choose to answer question 4 first, they often spend too long on this and then run out of time for questions 1, 2 or 3. Candidates who had been prepared well, even those who were clearly of lesser ability, managed to pick up marks on all questions, by knowing the assessment requirements and using sociological evidence appropriately. However, some centres did not seem adequately to have prepared their candidates, who either had very little understanding of the role of the pre-release material, for example, or copied out large chunks of the findings, or were armed with very little sociological knowledge for questions 1, 2 and 3.

On the whole there was a clear difference between the high and low achieving candidates. At the top end, there was a range of sociological evidence contained in answers to all of the questions. Such responses included relevant and detailed explanations, including sociological studies, concepts and theories where appropriate. The lower achieving candidates were often unable to provide sociological knowledge and understanding and their answers became very anecdotal and 'common sense'-like. Candidates must be encouraged to back up their answers with sociological evidence; be it concepts, studies, relevant contemporary examples or theory. For example, in answers to question (2), candidates who discussed the way that religion socialises individuals into their gender or ethnic identities scored more highly than those who wrote, for example, about churches being important places of worship for Christians.

In terms of assessment objectives, Knowledge and Understanding (AO1) remains the strongest area; good candidates were able to offer a whole range of sociological knowledge, mainly in the form of concepts and studies, but sometimes making relevant use of contemporary examples and theory. AO2a (Interpretation and analysis) seemed to be the most difficult skill area for candidates; whilst many have been trained to evaluate evidence and arguments, they are less successful at interpreting knowledge and applying it to the specific question or context. For example, in question 3, candidates were able to offer a range of studies relating to masculinity, but all too often focused on traditional masculinity, rather than new masculinities. It is also worth pointing out that a significant number of students are not offering any evaluation for question 3, which is worth 4 marks and candidates must be reminded that there is also an evaluative element to this question.

Comments on Individual Questions

1. In general this question was answered very well and the vast majority of candidates were able to express a core understanding of the term "norms" as referring to expected or acceptable ways of behaving / acting, and to offer two explained examples. A minority of candidates did not achieve full marks for the definition because they defined norms as "normal behaviour". Candidates do not get rewarded if they use the wording of the concept in their definition. Most examples were accurate and explained; more able students used theory such as Marxism and Functionalism to develop their response and the majority developed their knowledge of the definition by discussing cultural relativity and the link between norms and values. However, weaker responses were often left undeveloped in explanation, or repeated that it is a norm 'because it is normal'; this type of

response was undeveloped. Weak answers confused norms with values such as manners, or gave laws rather than norms. Examples did vary; the most common being "wearing a seat belt", which was then linked to the value of health and safety. Other common examples were norms related to masculinity and femininity and "eating with a knife and fork". Some students had a tendency to write too much, with extensive discussions of functionalism and socialisation which were not required. The most common reason for students failing to achieve full marks was the inclusion of only one example, or of several examples which were merely listed and not developed. Some good cross cultural examples, such as eating with a knife and fork, and different forms of marriage were also successfully used.

Teaching tip: Question 1 is always a concept question taken from the specification content. Ensure that students have detailed definitions and examples for each one. Encourage students to keep a glossary with all of these key terms.

2. This question was not very well answered on the whole, and many candidates struggled to include the required level of depth. Many candidates did not focus on religion as an agent of socialisation and instead wrote that religion influences identity through the family, or through education. Such responses tended to be basic as the focus veered away from religion to other agencies of socialisation. Rarely did students link religion to an aspect of identity, such as age, ethnic or gender identity, but where they did do this answers tended to be the strongest, as they were seeing religion as the agent of socialisation. Another feature of weaker answers was that religion and ethnicity were often confused and students used studies on ethnicity (e.g. Johal or Sewell) rather than specifically on religion. Good answers were able to separate religion from ethnicity, allowing them to consider the cultural effects of religion on identity. Such responses often used studied to develop their answers and add depth; for example Butler, Ghuman, Woodhead and Anwar. Where candidates applied sociological theory to understanding how religion socialised individuals, they tended to score highly; for example, by explaining the Marxist view that religion acts to stop individuals from realising their true class identity, by acting as an 'opium of the masses'. Some students confused their answers by using the study before identifying the way – so wrote 'one way in which religion effects identity is Butler found that……'. This resulted in it being difficult for the students to fully identify the way. The confusion here was that students had learnt these studies to show the formation of ethnic identity rather than the effect of religion so they struggled with application to the question. Only strong candidates were able to access top grades. The majority of responses were placed in level 2 as they relied on examples, without support from studies, theory and concepts. Such responses often made very vague points, relying on contemporary examples, or assertions about specific religions which were often not even accurate, as opposed to sociological evidence. It was not always possible to identify which two ways were being used, and weaker responses often contained an overlap between the two points – which were both often linked to the family, for example.

3. This question was generally well answered on the whole. The best answers contained a wide range of evidence and a real focus on the view that traditional masculinity no longer exists. Strong responses cited a range of studies - for example, Connell, Nixon, Mort, and Rutherford - and developed their answers with a range of concepts (such as marginalised masculinity, complicit masculinity, new man, Metrosexual, masculinity in crisis). The study from the pre-release material was often well used in this question. Very sophisticated answers often looked at the agents of socialisation and how men within them have either changed their masculinity or not - e.g. in the family; in the workplace - and these answers were conceptual, evidenced and full of great examples. Some candidates also successfully applied evidence on the feminisation of the workforce, Wilkinson's 'genderquake', and Sharpe's research to show that female advancement may have contributed to the demise of traditional masculinity. Some candidates focused too heavily on general responses about gender identity, especially reciting Oakley's work (canalisation, manipulation) without

linking this to the specific question. Some responses drew on work from the family and used studies on conjugal roles. This was sometimes applied effectively but some responses did not apply this to the question, simply reciting findings. There were a number of candidates who wrote in detail but were unable to achieve marks because they focused too much on traditional masculinity existing. Such responses often began with a history of masculinity 'this is how it used to be…' and wrote in detail about this (for example, Oakley, Feminism, Parsons), but this was irrelevant unless it written in an evaluative way. One feature of stronger responses was the presence of explicit evaluation of the question. The most common approach was to cite evidence that traditional masculinity does still exist. Some candidates, however, spend far too much time evaluating the view in the question whilst there are also a significant number of candidates who don't offer evaluation points at all and therefore loose four potential marks. Candidates need to be reminded that this question will always start with the instruction to "*explain and briefly evaluate*".

4.   There was, once again, a wide range of responses to this question, although the overall standard seems to have improved as teachers are increasingly familiar with the format of this question. The vast majority of candidates knew how to define qualitative methods, linking them with interpretivism and the methods in the pre-release of semi-structured interviews and diaries. Most candidates were able to discuss issues surrounding the wider research process, such as sampling, access and ethics.   A key differentiator in marking this question was candidates' use of the key concepts as highlighted in the specification - validity, reliability, representativeness and generalisability. Some weaker responses did not explicitly use these concepts and therefore achieved marks at the bottom of level 2. Others did attempt to use the concepts but were very confused, partial or undeveloped. To reach level 3 of the mark scheme, and beyond, for both AO1 and AO2b, responses needed to address the key concepts in an accurate and wide-ranging way. Even where candidates correctly discussed the key concepts, they were often not developed enough in explanation to reach level 4. For example, responses which state that the sample was small and therefore not representative were not fully demonstrating a core understanding of the concept 'representativeness'. There were significant numbers of responses which focused on mixed methods and/or spent a long time discussing the quantitative aspect of the research (time use diaries). Such responses were irrelevant, as the question was specifically focused on qualitative data. Centres need to be reminded that it is not recommended practice to "question spot" for this question. Candidates need to be taught the pre-release in a detailed and analytical way, which will enable them to answer any potential question in the examination.

The high achieving responses tended to explain the method systematically, offering a range of strengths and weaknesses and including key concepts. Another characteristic of strong responses was discussion of aspects of the wider research process; for example, sampling, access, ethics and the impact of these. Many candidates made good use of theory in their responses, linking Haurari & Hollingworth's research design to the interpretivist tradition and offering a positivist critique. Strong responses recognised the qualitative nature of the findings and used these to illustrate strengths / weaknesses of the method. Such responses tended to be conceptually strong, referring to issues surrounding social desirability, rapport, verstehen and interviewer effects. Teachers need to ensure that they spend some time teaching the content of the pre-release material in preparation for the exam. One real problem is in the number of candidates who waste time copying out the pre-release material and describing the findings of the study; once again, it should be emphasised that this is stimulus material, not source material. The philosophy behind the pre-release material is to give candidates the opportunity to look at some real research in depth, but the exam question will always require them to go wider than this; to address research issues, methods, process and concepts and using the pre-release as an illustrative example.

It must also be noted that twelve marks are awarded for AO2a and in this question it is about how well the candidate contextualises their responses. Overall, students were much better at contextualising compared to previous sessions. To score highly in this skill area, candidates need to be asking themselves "What is the problem/advantage of using this method for studying THIS particular group (parents / children / families) on THIS particular topic (fatherhood)?" Candidates need to be encouraged to highlight the actual question on the question paper, particularly where it states "to research....". Stronger responses in this area offered some very thoughtful comments about, for example, how the study of fatherhood is a sensitive topic area and how family members may act in a socially desirable way to promote themselves as 'good fathers', using children in research with issues of attention span and the diverse range of families today, for example, no single parent families were included. Candidates who did score more highly on this skill engaged much more fully with the context. A minority of students focussed too heavily on this at the expense of applying key concepts.

The findings were included in the pre-release material to enable candidates to gain an understanding of the value of this research and to discuss the idea of method being 'fit for purpose'. There were some strong responses which linked the findings to the research methodology; for example by recognising the depth and detail which can be gathered by using qualitative methods. Some centres had trained candidates to make reference to other research which had either used a similar methodology or which was focused on a similar topic. This was rewarded when used to support or criticise a methodological issue, but centres need to advise students not to spend time describing the findings of other studies as this is a question about methods.

G672 Topics in Socialisation, Culture and Identity

General Comments:

The Family continues to be the most popular option, followed by Youth and Religion. There were very few scripts submitted for the Health option. An overwhelming majority of candidates chose to answer both Family questions and only a small number chose questions from more than one option. Generally candidates used their time appropriately, producing between ¾ to one page of the answer booklet for part (a) and at least three pages for part (b). Only a few appeared to run out of time on the second part (b) question. Very few candidates answered either too many questions or only one question. Overall, candidates fulfilled the requirements in terms of quality of written communication, producing work written in continuous prose and with clarity of expression.

Most candidates demonstrated sociological knowledge and understanding by referring to theories, studies, concepts and relevant contemporary evidence. Some candidates needed to explain ideas more fully to show the extent of their knowledge and understanding and apply evidence in support of the point being made. The best answers were both wide-ranging and detailed and showed a broad and in-depth knowledge and understanding of the topic. Some responses were brief and needed a wider focus on different aspects of the topic. Others covered a range of issues but needed greater depth or development of evidence to achieve higher marks.

Part (a) Questions

Most candidates seemed to understand what was required by the instruction 'identify and explain' with ideas typically grouped together under two clear paragraphs. There was only a small number of candidates covering three or more points or providing an essay type response in which it was unclear what the two reasons or ways were. Many responses achieved the 'good' mark band (level 3), but did not achieve level 4 because the answers were underdeveloped. There was clear identification of particular points but these needed to be expanded upon with sociological evidence and terminology in order to achieve Level 4. Candidates need to be aware that, to achieve full marks, points should be developed with supporting evidence in the form of research findings or other data, together with relevant theories and concepts, and this needs to be done for both ways or reasons.

An effective approach to achieve Level 4 is to identify two broad reasons/ways/factors etc. that can be developed in a number of ways within the answer; e.g. citing 'effects of legislation' rather than a specific Act allows the candidate to include a wider range. Similarly, 'changing norms and values' as a broad point gives scope for a variety of issues to be included within this, rather than specifying a particular aspect of changing norms and values, e.g. secularisation, which then needs to be supported in a wide-ranging and detailed way. Additionally, if answers are clearly signposted through two paragraphs, this makes it easier for the candidate to check if they are fully answering the question.

Candidates can improve their marks by making sure that they:
- Carefully select the two points that can be best supported with evidence.
- Consider if they can identify two broad points that can be developed in a number of ways within the answer.
- Fully explain the two identified points with relevant sociological theories, studies, concepts and/or contemporary evidence to develop their answer.
- Choose two points that don't overlap.

- Avoid lengthy and unnecessary introductions to part (a) answers before actually proceeding to identify and explain the two points.
- Include only material that is required, e.g. criticisms are not needed in part (a) questions as there are no marks for evaluation.

Teachers' Tip for part (a) questions - Use a separate paragraph for each of the two points to be identified and explained. An effective format to start the first paragraph is, for example, 'One way in which...' The second paragraph can then begin with 'A second way in which...' Candidates should be encouraged to write about one side of a booklet page for a part (a) answer.

Part (b) Questions

On part (b) questions most candidates showed a grasp of broad theoretical perspectives, but some candidates didn't support these with empirical evidence. Perspectives-based answers along the lines of 'functionalists would argue x while Marxists would argue y' should offer evidence to illustrate/support these arguments, for example, in the form of studies, contemporary example and/or statistical data. Most candidates answered questions in a sociological, rather than purely common sense manner and even the less developed responses usually included some references to sociological concepts, studies and/or theories. Most answers contained some element of evaluation, but on weaker scripts this was often in the form of juxtaposed theories or studies which didn't explicitly address the question and/or the debate. The best answers used evidence explicitly to support evaluative statements about a specified view or theory and reach conclusions. Such answers tended to use evaluative language which created an 'evaluative tone' to the discussion. In some cases, points of evaluation were presented without any supporting evidence to develop the point. Very good answers also tended to be ones which used up-to-date and contemporary research.

Candidates can improve their marks by making sure that they:
- Include sufficient sociological evidence to demonstrate wide and detailed knowledge and understanding. The best responses made accurate use of a range of sociological theories, concepts and/or studies.
- Carefully select the material to be included to make sure that it is relevant and used in such a way that it supports or refutes an argument being made and avoid simply listing evidence.
- Address different sides of the argument and support with evidence.
- Offer critical comments about evidence, weigh up arguments and draw a reasoned conclusion.
- Write an answer that covers at least 3 pages of the booklet.

Teachers' Tip on Knowledge and Understanding - To achieve the highest marks in the skill of knowledge and understanding, candidates need to show a detailed understanding and so must learn as much as they can about the evidence they are using, to be able to write about it in an informed way. Teachers should aim to select teaching material that will best facilitate this process and use evidence that gives depth and detail.

The skill of interpretation and application is challenging for some candidates who tend to list evidence without applying it to the question.

Teachers' Tip on Interpretation and Application- To achieve the highest marks in the skill of interpretation and application, candidates need to select and apply different types of data including theories, concepts and/or contemporary 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. Applying sociological material to the question can be enhanced by including phrases that explicitly use the

wording of the question, e.g. 'This study shows that radical feminists view relationships in the family as oppressive to women'.

Many candidates demonstrate very good skills in analysis and evaluation. Others need to avoid simply juxtaposing views by analysing arguments so that they can then evaluate the strengths and weaknesses. Analysis involves breaking down an argument to gain a clearer understanding. This is an essential stage in the evaluation process. A sustained evaluation is needed to achieve the best marks and this involves candidates using an evaluative tone from their introductory paragraph onwards so that evaluation is evident throughout their answer.

Teachers' Tip on Analysis and Evaluation – A sustained evaluative approach can be demonstrated by candidates writing an evaluative introduction, making some pertinent evaluative points about studies, theories and ideas used, and summarising the different views in relation to the question. Candidates could be encouraged to use key evaluative terms that signal that they are evaluating the evidence or the argument at a given point, e.g. 'however', 'on the other hand', 'conversely', 'on the contrary', 'in contrast', 'this evidence can be criticised because...'

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No.

1 (a) The vast majority of candidates were able to identify two reasons with the most widely used being changing roles in families / households, emerging changes in types of households and changing family size – a lot of answers on smaller families were supported with statistical trends and lone parent families were explained with reference to changes in divorce law/acceptance of divorce. A number of these answers didn't refer to enough sociological research for a level 4 answer but did use underdeveloped evidence and concepts. The best answers used concepts and evidence to support their points, such as individualisation by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim. Some responses had introductions defining households, which rarely added to their answers, whilst a small minority focused too heavily on historical change (e.g. pre-industrial to industrial) and therefore did not meet the 'recent years' element of the question.

1 (b) This question was generally well answered. Many candidates were able to locate this debate very well within a theoretical context although some were less clear on the distinctions between the Marxist and Functionalist views. Typically candidates provided a developed account of Parsons and Murdoch's views, with a few candidates supporting these ideas further with links to Fletcher and the New Right. The majority of evaluation points took the form of Marxist and Feminist counterpoints on the contribution of the family as well as ignoring the "dark side" of the family. A minority of answers drifted into family diversity. The best answers explicitly criticised Functionalist views before offering alternative explanations, or developed evaluative tone by consistently questioning the true contribution the family makes to society: e.g. Marxists believe it makes a significant contribution but see it as negatively assisting capitalist society.

2 (a) Most candidates showed a good understanding of this question. Answers covered a range of views, including child-centeredness, improving relations with fathers and children, paranoid parenting, helicopter parenting and toxic childhood. Palmer and Postman were the sociologists most often cited, with the best answers typically combining concepts with evidence demonstrating both range and depth. A small minority of candidates offered theoretical views on the relationship between children and parents e.g a Functionalist view or a Feminist view. A few candidates spent too much time focusing on the social construction of childhood or the erosion of childhood without linking it back to views on relationships between parents and children.

2 (b) There was a range of responses to this question as it focused on views rather than a specified view and also offered a range of interpretations as to whether certain views considered family diversity to be a benefit or a negative. The majority contrasted Postmodern and Feminist views to Functionalist and New Right. Overall a wide range of evidence was used to answer the question with frequent use of the work of Oakley, Rappaports, Stacey and Dunne. Some weaker answers listed types of diversity rather than specifically addressing the question. The best answers explicitly criticised particular viewpoints as well as offering alternative viewpoints. There was a significant number of candidates who juxtaposed different views on family diversity with a tendency to become list-like in their approach.

3 (a) There was a variety of responses to this question, with the most common citing variations between cultures/cultural differences and different approaches to defining health and illness. There were high numbers of undeveloped and underdeveloped answers that didn't use specific evidence or examples to back up their points and were often commonsensical and lacking in sociological material. The best answers used evidence by Blaxter or Illich to support their points and gave good contemporary examples such as 'sinking heart' to illustrate the cultural relativity of ill health.

3 (b) There was a range of levels of response to this question, with the best answers demonstrating a keen knowledge of the many structural factors. Typically the best answers used evidence from gender, ethnicity, marginalisation, poverty and employment patterns, and utilised studies by Rogers and Pilgrim, Putnam and Myers. Evaluation and analysis was generally weaker and tended to be juxtaposed rather than explicitly evaluating particular points. Most commonly labelling and social construction were cited in evaluation with the work of Goffman, Rosenhan and Foucault being the most used. There were some candidates who found it difficult to draw on specific evidence and were therefore able to access only Level 2 at best.

4 (a) There was a variety of levels of understanding of this question. The best answers identified two clear ways, such as maintaining a monopoly or using status, and then proceeded to use sociological evidence that typically came from Weberian or Marxist viewpoints. Some candidates struggled to identify explicitly two ways and produced a generalised response which was often anecdotal with repetitions. The best candidates constructed an answer around particular ways using multiple sources of evidence and key terminology.

4 (b) There was a broad range of responses with most candidates showing some understanding of patterns of ill health relating social class. Typically answers related to cultural/behavioural explanations, artefact explanations, structural/materialist explanations and evidence on diet. Sociological studies were commonly used, such as Lobstein, Tudor Hart, Paterson and Annandale and Field. Evaluation was more commonly juxtaposed and tended to not explicitly criticise current material. Most typical in evaluation was citing studies for ethnicity, cultural relativity and gender. On occasion there was a lack of any sociological evidence resulting in level 2 answers at best.

5 (a) This question was generally well answered, with size of organisations and hierarchies being the most common and the contrasting of churches to sects being very prevalent. Evidence was most commonly given in the form of contemporary examples or statistics such as the citing of the People's Temple example. Typically the evidence was underdeveloped with both range and depth needed to achieve level 4. The best answers did make reference to sociological studies such as Wallis, Wilson and Barker.

5 (b) This question was generally answered well. The best answers included the work of Durkheim, Parsons and Malinowski and often to some level of depth and detail with significant key concepts such as collective conscience, organic analogy and social solidarity. This was then evaluated with Marxism and Weberianism. Specific evaluation was not usually present with

a more juxtaposed approach remaining the norm. On occasion, candidates strayed away from the idea of promoting consensus to a simple outlining of different theories.

6 (a) Most candidates showed some understanding of this question but answers tended to be unclear on providing two distinct ways. Those that did tended to refer to participation and women in hierarchies/patriarchy as the ways that religiosity is related to gender. The sociological evidence that was most common was the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Miller and Hoffman. Weaker answers cited norms and values and cultural dress with little or generalised evidence in support.

6 (b) Again, this question yielded a range of responses. Most candidates interpreted this as a question about secularisation in general, rather than looking specifically at religious pluralism as a sign of secularisation. Some answers used the works of Wilson, Berger, Bruce and Giddens in support and contrasted it with the work of Davie and the rise of NRMs. Evaluation tended to be less explicit and was not sustained with different counterpoints being provided on secularisation.

7 (a) This question was answered well overall, with reference to a good range of studies and examples built around particular points. The more frequently cited reasons were sense of belonging, sense of identity, shared norms and values and rebellion. A range of evidence was used in support, with studies from the CCCS and Functionalism proving popular. On occasion, candidates did have some overlap on their two reasons and therefore needed to make each reason distinct to get into Level 4. The best answers articulated each reason and gave substantial evidence in support, e.g. using the reason of providing the opportunity for transition and reinforcing the point with Parsons and Eisenstadt.

7 (b) This essay was generally answered well, with most candidates identifying a range of factors inside and outside schools that may limit the achievement of working classes and/or advantage upper and middle classes. Most frequently answers revolved around material deprivation/private schooling, labelling and creation of sub-cultures and attitudes to learning/parental interest with evidence from Willis, Bourdieu, Douglas, Becker and Bernstein being most common. The majority of answers then evaluated by referring to ethnicity and gender. A significant majority of these answers evaluated as a second half through counterpoints, e.g class does not have the greatest impact, gender does, followed by gender studies related to school. This was therefore not sustained evaluation and limited the evaluation marks from achieving Level 4. Some candidates lacked the specific evidence in support of this question and had a tendency to communicate anecdotally about school life in a generalised way.

8 (a) The most common answers for this question were: more offending being carried out by males, less offending being carried out by females, thrill seeking/edgework, and social control amongst females. This was then explained in a variety of ways using evidence by Lyng, Katz, Smart and McRobbie. Typically, candidates who cited statistics to reinforce points made about offending rates, rarely produced a developed enough answer to be awarded Level 4 and usually only quoted an underdeveloped statistical correlation. Indeed very few answers questioned the validity of crime statistics. The best answers were able to fully address the question with range and depth.

8 (b) Most candidates managed to outline the Functionalist position using the work of Parsons, Eisenstadt, Abrams and in some cases, Roszak. Too often, depth of knowledge and key concepts for these studies was missing and Level 3 was typical for this answer in terms of knowledge and understanding. The Functionalist view was contrasted with neo-Marxist, Feminist and Postmodern viewpoints but too often these were juxtaposed and answers did not explicitly evaluate or criticise. A few candidates outlined the Functionalist position on subculture and its relationship to deviance but were not able to fully answer the question on the role of youth culture. The best answers had an evaluative tone throughout and had both depth and range in their understanding of Functionalism.

G673 Power and Control

General Comments:

As in previous sessions, many candidates displayed a wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of concepts and studies, showing that they had obviously prepared well for the examination and that their grasp of sociological theories was very good. The theoretical understanding of most candidates was good, with many being able to identify and apply appropriate theories, and the strongest being able to make links between them, both evaluative and analytical. Theories were often supported by a range of studies, both classic and contemporary, as well as useful contemporary examples. At times the link between studies and evidence used and the theoretical debates was less clearly identified, and some candidates were confused on basic issues, such as the differences between left and right, or between functionalist and Marxist views.

A notable issue this year was candidates' ability to focus their response on the question set. This was particularly evident on Question 1 in the Crime and Deviance option and Question 4 in the Education option, where it appeared that candidates were unable to use their knowledge to successfully answer a question for which they had not been specifically prepared. It is expected that, at this level, candidates will be able to select and apply their knowledge to address the question set, rather than reproducing responses which they may have seen on previous papers, or completed as practice during their course. Interpretation and Application is an important skill, and centres should note that only knowledge which is specifically relevant to the question is given full credit. Centres should also avoid 'question-spotting'. This issue was particularly evident within the education option, where many candidates were clearly expecting different questions, and often ploughed on regardless, ignoring the question which were actually set, and severely limiting their marks.

A significant related point is that many candidates spent far too little time discussing knowledge relevant to the view in the question, sometimes giving only two or three sentences on this before moving on to discuss, often at length, opposing views. Centres should note that candidates gain very few AO1 marks for discussing material which is not specifically related to the view in the question. This is made clear in the mark-scheme. This issue was particularly noticeable in Questions 10 and 11, but also a common problem in Questions 1, 2, 8 and 9 – so specifically questions where a particular theory or view was identified in the question. Whilst some of these candidates went on to score highly for Analysis and Evaluation, albeit at the expense of their Knowledge and Understanding marks, others merely presented alternative views with no link back to the view in the question at all – merely being rewarded for juxtaposition. It is regrettable that many candidates who have written at great length about various sociological theories and studies will have found that they did not score as highly as expected, because much of this material was not relevant to the question set.

Another issue which is preventing some candidates from achieving higher levels is the lack of detail and accuracy in their explanations. Candidates must fully demonstrate the depth of their understanding. Too often relevant studies were accurately selected and named, but then not fully explained or applied, with just a sentence given, for example. Additionally, names and findings were often used interchangeably by weaker candidates, with no clear understanding regarding who said what.

Evaluation and Analysis was often demonstrated strongly, with many candidates managing to link ideas together and show support or criticism within their arguments. Again, lack of depth is an issue here, and some 'throwaway' evaluative points could have been developed a little more, which would have attracted more marks. Candidates should make clear why they are making the point and how it challenges the view being discussed. As mentioned in previous sessions,

merely using connectives such as 'however' does not necessarily demonstrate evaluation if it is merely placed at the beginning of a section describing an alternative view. Candidates must be encouraged to explain the basis for any disagreement, and how this demonstrates a weakness in the view in question. Evaluation needs to be explicit and relevant, and fully developed.

The strongest candidates sustained their evaluation throughout their response, creating a critical commentary, which included strengths and supporting evidence as well as weaknesses. However, as in previous sessions, some candidates spent a lot of time evaluating opposing views, which, due to lack of focus on the question at hand, gains little or no credit. Candidates should be encouraged to always make explicit evaluative points of each explanation discussed, to maximise AO2b marks.

There are still some candidates who are clearly being encouraged to write very general introductions, defining crime and deviance for example, or the media, or offering a potted history of education reform since 1944. Such generalised introductions attract no additional marks. Candidates should be encouraged to get focused on the question set immediately, since such generalised knowledge attracts very little credit.

There were few rubric errors this session, and the majority of candidates answered two questions from within the same option. Some candidates who had prepared for the Mass Media option successfully answered Question 2. However, a minority of candidates who had clearly prepared for the Education option elected to answer Question 11 from the Power and Politics option alongside Question 5, apparently believing it to be about the Marxist view on the role of education. Generally, their limited knowledge of the Marxist theory of power meant that such candidates did not score highly on this question.

Comments on Individual Questions:

CRIME AND DEVIANCE:

This was by far the most popular topic area, with many extremely good responses.

Question No.1

This was a very popular question from this option; however, many candidates did not gain as many marks for this as they did for their other response. The question asked about feminist views of crime and deviance, yet many candidates produced responses which discussed gender differences in crime rates, with only vague or incidental references to feminism. Whilst some of the material in such a response was relevant, some was very difficult to credit. For example, many candidates wrote at length about Pollak and his ideas on hidden female crime. Some suggested that he was a feminist, some assumed he was female, others did not; but either way, this material was not creditable as relevant knowledge. Similarly, long sections explaining why males commit more crime, using Messerschmidt or subcultural theorists such as Albert Cohen, were not creditable as relevant knowledge relating to feminist views. Candidates should be encouraged to read the precise question set and consider carefully how their knowledge can be applied to address it specifically. Weaker candidates sometimes made very generalised points about crime, prefixing each with 'feminists argue..' but were unable to provide any supporting evidence.

There were other inaccuracies which were quite commonly seen. One example is that Adler was often discussed as writing about ladettes, which is not accurate. Linking the appropriate person to the appropriate ideas and concepts is important to maximise marks. Similarly, Heidensohn was often used as a 'catch-all' feminist writing on crime, with virtually all ideas being credited to her.

Some candidates successfully identified different approaches to the issue of crime and deviance taken by different 'strands' of feminism, with varying degrees of accuracy, though this approach was not required. Stronger candidates considered a range of different issues which feminists have considered, including control, socialisation, the treatment of female victims and changes in rates of female criminality.

Candidates tended to evaluate the view in the question effectively with reference to other perspectives on crime, with Marxism being the most likely. Pollak and ideas of chivalry were often successfully used in an evaluative way, as were biological explanations. Specific criticisms relating to gender bias, examples of improvements to the way female victims are treated and males being victims were also successfully used. However, some candidates went off at tangents and lost focus on the question, discussing other theoretical views on crime at length and losing any focus on feminist views.

Common studies: Heidensohn, Carlen, Oakley, Lees, McRobbie and Garber, Smart, Dobash and Dobash, Adler, Walklate.

Common concepts: patriarchy, malestream, double deviance, chivalry, control, differential socialisation, bedroom culture.

Question No.2

This was, perhaps surprisingly, the least popular question in this option, though a small number of candidates who had clearly prepared for option 3 did also answer this question with some success. Stronger candidates fully engaged with the notion of amplification, though weaker candidates appeared to think that amplification merely meant representation. There were many interesting examples of moral panics, from the classic work of Cohen to more contemporary issues of hoodies, Islamophobia and 'Benefits Street'. Many candidates applied interactionism and labelling, using Becker and Lemert, though not all successfully maintained their focus on the role of the media. Marxist and neo-Marxist ideas were also applied, with stronger candidates differentiating between Interactionist and Marxist explanations of the role of the media in the amplification of crime and deviance, utilizing ideas of ideological control from Althusser and the work of Hall et al. Weaker responses did not take a theoretical approach, and some merely gave examples of crime representations in the media, or of moral panics. Some candidates relied heavily on contemporary examples, mentioning ecstasy, gun crime and Islamophobia, but with no supporting sociological evidence.

In evaluation, many candidates successfully developed ideas from McRobbie and Thornton, questioning the continued relevance of moral panics to the idea of deviance amplification. Other theories such as functionalists and realists were also used in evaluation, with varying degrees of success.

Common studies: Becker, S.Cohen, Young, Wilkins, Hall, Fawbert

Common concepts: labelling, self-fulfilling-prophecy, moral panics, folk devils, moral entrepreneurs, stereotyping, scapegoats, demonisation

Question No. 3

This was a popular question and the majority of candidates seemed very well prepared for this topic area, with most clearly able to draw upon both Right and Left realist solutions. Stronger candidates produced a balance of Right and Left realist views, with a range of different ideas from within each perspective. Most candidates began with brief explanations of crime from the

realist perspectives, but moved quickly on to focusing on solutions. Weaker responses did not address both types of realism, confused the two and/ or failed to address solutions at all.

A wide range of ideas was covered within both branches of realism. Within right realism candidates tended to focus on Wilson (and Kelling) and the idea of 'broken windows', which was usually accurately explained, zero-tolerance policing, rational choice theory, situational and environmental crime prevention measures, retributive justice and incarceration (often linked to '3-strikes') and New Right policies relating to the 'underclass'. Left realism was generally addressed by discussing the concepts of relative deprivation, marginalisation and subculture, and sometimes reference was made to the 'square of crime', but a range of solutions were then discussed, including community/ consensual policing, improvements to welfare/ housing/ leisure facilities and education, multi-agency working and restorative justice. Some candidates made links to the police relationship with ethnic minorities, for example using the 2011 Riots to demonstrate the need for better community relations.

Many candidates were able to provide sustained evaluation of the solutions raised, often drawing sophisticated contrasts between the two approaches and scoring highly for AO2b. Some candidates presented alternative solutions, for example, from feminists and/ or Marxists, though these were often merely juxtaposed and not used to fully critique the realist solutions.

Common Studies: Wilson (and Kelling), Murray, Hirschi, Clarke, Lea and Young, Braithwaite, Kinsey

Common concepts: zero tolerance, broken windows, target hardening, retribution, situational crime prevention, environmental crime prevention, reintegrative shaming, restorative justice.

EDUCATION:

This was the second most popular option after crime and deviance, with a fairly equal spread between the questions.

Question No. 4

Though a fairly popular choice, there was a surprising lack of understanding of what this question was about, despite its apparent straightforwardness. Some candidates who discussed interactionist views confidently in question 5 as evaluation seemed unable to recognise that such views were relevant in this question. A small minority of candidates discussed general theories of the role of education, for example, functionalist, Marxist, liberal and social democratic views, with no reference to interactionism at all. This suggests that candidates had been 'primed' to assume that question 4 would always be about the 'role' of education, and were unable to comprehend the question, which is clearly within the requirements of the specification. Centres should avoid question-spotting or 'teaching to the exam', since candidates who cannot be flexible in their approach to questions will find themselves disadvantaged compared to those who have been prepared more thoroughly.

Stronger candidates were able to examine interactionist views in detail drawing upon a range of concepts and studies. Many referred to studies on gender and ethnicity as well as social class and more general studies of labelling, and some successfully linked in studies on pupil subcultures, such as those by Willis and Mac an Ghaill. There was sometimes a lack of detail and also accuracy in distinguishing who said what, with the 'ideal pupil' attributed to all sort of different interactionists, for example. Some weaker responses generalised interactionist views without reference to studies and then juxtaposed alternative contributions to the study of education. A significant number of candidates spend far longer describing functionalist and Marxist views on education, or outside school factors, than the interactionist perspective.

Stronger candidates engaged in sustained evaluation, though often methodological criticisms about representativeness were 'thrown in' after every study mentioned.

Common studies: Becker, Rosenthal and Jacobson, Rist, Ball, Hargreaves, Gillbourn and Youdell, Willis, Keddie, Wright

Common concepts: labelling, master status, self-fulfilling-prophecy, stereotyping, counter school subcultures, banding and streaming.

Question No. 5

This question was the most popular in this option by a small margin, and produced some very strong responses. Most responses considered a range of home-based explanations for class differences in education, including both cultural and material factors, though a small minority did not recognise material deprivation as a home-based influence and used it instead to evaluate cultural deprivation.

Stronger candidates were able to theoretically frame the explanations they discussed, focusing on Marxist views for material deprivation and functionalists for cultural deprivation, though many recognised an overlap, correctly identifying Bourdieu's views on cultural capital as neo-Marxist, for example. Many candidates did not go beyond Bernstein and Sugarman for cultural deprivation and Smith and Noble for material deprivation, but a range of other evidence was successfully applied. Depth and accuracy varied widely and were the key distinguishers for this question. Some candidates used an extremely wide-range of relevant studies, though sometimes at the expense of depth, and some responses tended to be 'list-like'.

In terms of evaluation, merely juxtaposing competing explanations (usually school based factors or peer groups) did not attract significant evaluation marks. Evaluation needs to be explicit, discussing specific limitations of each explanation presented. Some candidates penalised themselves by not doing this.

Common studies: Douglas, Hyman, Feinstein, Sugarman, Murray, Bernstein, Bourdieu, Smith and Noble, Hutchings, McKnight, Reay, Halsey, Callender and Jackson, Gewirtz, Ball

Common concepts: cultural and material deprivation, cultural capital, restricted and elaborated code, deferred and immediate gratification, fatalism, different types of 'choosers'.

Question No. 6

This question proved popular within this option, and many candidates showed an impressive range of knowledge on educational policies. As with previous questions on educational policies, there were still a few candidates who provided lengthy sections on the tripartite system or historical policies, which attracted little or no credit. There were also many areas of inaccurate understanding or confusion regarding policies. The Education Reform Act 1988 was commonly said to have replaced the tripartite system, for example. Additionally, many candidates mistakenly claimed that Curriculum 2000 was a New Labour policy, when it was in fact introduced by John Major's Conservative Government.

Stronger candidates were able to confidently describe a range of policies introduced as part of ERA 1988 (many said it was introduced by the 'New Right Government'), and link these to New Right ideas about marketization, competition and choice, but also to discuss more recent policies which have New Right influence, such as academies and specialist schools. Many candidates successfully adopted a chronological approach to this question; this helped to give

their answer structure and focus. Those who scored highly understood and made clear the premises behind New Right thinking.

Weaker candidates were unable to distinguish between later policies which were clearly not influenced by New Right ideas, such as Surestart and EMA. Some candidates appeared to be producing a pre-learned policies answer, and focussed on 'equality of opportunity' or 'diversity and choice' - both subjects of previous examination questions - again showing an inability to address the question set. It was not uncommon to see no reference to the New Right at all, and merely a discussion of a list of policies. The depth of understanding of what each policy entailed and its implications and effects was also a key distinguisher.

In terms of evaluation, many candidates scored highly, often using Marxists and Social Democratic ideas to challenge New Right policies and making use of writers such as Ball & Gewirtz on 'choosers'.

Common names/ policies/ concepts: ERA, parentocracy, marketization, open enrolment, OFSTED, the National Curriculum, SATs, league tables, Academies, vocationalism, specialist schools, Free Schools, tuition fees, Chubb and Moe

MASS MEDIA:

Overall, a much less popular option, with a wide variance in the standard of responses.

Question No. 7

This question was not very popular, even for those who selected this option. Some candidates were able to use a theoretical approach to fully address the question which asked for *sociological explanations* of representations of age. However, it was more common for candidates to take a wholly empirical approach to this question, citing studies and examples rather than engaging with theory. Weaker responses were based on contemporary examples only, becoming largely 'common-sense', and not giving any 'explanations' at all. Conversely, some candidates who did take a theoretical approach, perhaps contrasting Marxist and pluralist views on representations of age in the media, sometimes provided very little evidence to support these explanations. Candidates who used theory and supported it with empirical evidence scored most highly.

It was common for candidates to consider a range of age-groups, often discussing representations of children, youths and older people, though depth and use of evidence varied.

In evaluation, stronger candidates used examples and evidence to challenge each explanation and to show that representations are changing. Postmodernist views were successfully used in this way. Some also used feminists to argue that gender is actually more significant than age in terms of stereotypical representations and that these two factors intersect, using examples such as Arlene Phillips and Miriam O'Reilly. Similarly, intersections of age with social class and with ethnicity were also successfully used to create a critical commentary regarding representations, with some candidates using studies such as Gilroy and Hall on moral panics surrounding portrayals of black youths, and examples comparing representations of children (such as comparisons of Madeleine McCann and Shannon Matthews) to illustrate issues of social class and portrayals of children. It was not uncommon for weaker candidates to include no explicit evaluation or analysis, merely describing the way that various age-groups are represented.

Common studies: Heintz-Knowles, Wayne et al, S.Cohen, Hall, Fawbert, Sontag,

Common concepts: moral panics, folk devils, demonisation

Question No. 8

This question was quite popular within this option, but did not tend to produce many high scoring responses. It was common for candidates to write just a couple of lines describing what the method of content analysis involved, before discussing strengths and weaknesses, often in a very underdeveloped and list-like way. Many candidates then went on to write at length about other methods, such as semiology, and experiments, and evaluate these, often with no reference back to content analysis. Some studies which utilized content analysis were referred to, but often very briefly, or their findings were discussed, rather than the way they used the method.

Candidates tended to score more highly for 'Analysis and Evaluation' than for 'Knowledge and Understanding' on this question, since they framed much of their knowledge of content analysis in the form of strength and weaknesses, using illustrative studies to support these. This is partly due to the nature of the question, and such candidates were not penalised, since they maximised their AO2b marks, but could not be double credited.

Common studies: Ferguson, GUMG, Lobban, Van Dijk, Wayne et al

Common concepts: reliability, validity, ethics, meanings

Question No. 9

Most candidates were able to explain the pluralist view on the ownership and control of the media, showing understanding of why they may see it as shared. It was recognised that there is a relatively narrow range of empirical evidence supporting the pluralist view, so full credit was given to examples. Stronger candidates discussed examples of programmes being axed and newspapers shutting down, the rise of social media (such as twitter) increasing audience involvement in agenda-setting, citizen journalism and examples of investigative journalism and the media breaking stories about the government or the powerful, such as the banking crisis and the MPs expenses scandal to support pluralist ideas. There were some excellent discussions of the media's role as the 'fourth estate'.

In evaluation, specific examples, such as Rupert Murdoch's interventions in the content of his media outputs, were successfully used. Marxist and neo-Marxist views were also used to directly challenge ideas of shared control. However, weaker candidates wrote very little about the pluralist view and spent the bulk of the response discussing Marxist and neo-Marxist views on the ownership and control of the media, without necessarily linking this back evaluatively to the view in the question. Others went through trends in media ownership, such as concentration and diversification, without linking these successfully to the debate in the question.

Common studies: Whale, Galtung and Ruge, Bagdikian, Curran, Davies

Common concepts: fourth estate, citizen journalism, news values, agenda setting, hegemony, concentration, transnational ownership, diversification

POWER AND POLITICS:

This topic area remains the least popular, with few responses seen.

Question No. 10

This question was popular within this option. Most candidates were able to explain what New Social Movements are, using examples successfully. However, not enough focus on the postmodern view of reasons for joining NSMs was given by most candidates, and some merely

went through various explanations for joining NSMs in a list-like and pre-prepared manner, with little attempt to address the question. Discussions of RMT, CBT and Marxist explanations for New Social Movements were often given more weight than postmodern views on the search for identity. Stronger responses successfully used examples such as LGBT movements to discuss how these may illustrate a search for identity for members.

There were examples of excellent analysis and evaluation using alternative perspectives, for example, drawing on similarities and differences between Collective Behaviour and Resource Mobilization Theories and postmodernist ideas. The ideas of Touraine were often used to link perspectives together, and notions of globalization and the work of Klein were also often successfully linked to postmodern ideas in both a critical and a supportive manner. Marxist ideas were often used evaluatively, but there was a tendency in this question for weaker candidates to merely juxtapose different views, with no explicit evaluative comments.

Common names: Touraine, Klein, Giddens, Beck, Smelser, Habermas, Melucci, Hallsworth, Klein
Common concepts: Collective identity, consumption, lifestyle politics

Question No. 11

This question was popular within this option, though relatively few responses were seen in total. Stronger answers focused on Marxist views on the distribution of power, using a range of ideas from writers such as Marx himself, Miliband, Poulantzas, Althusser and Gramsci. However, many candidates wrote very little on Marxist views, perhaps giving a fairly basic Marxist account based on ownership of the means of production, before going on to discuss alternative theories of power at length. Centres must make clear to candidates that very little credit is gained from discussing views alternative to those identified in the question, unless they are used to explicitly support or evaluate the view in the question, when they will gain credit for AO2b. Consequently, some very lengthy and detailed answers scored low marks for AO1, rarely achieving anything higher than level 3, despite a wide-ranging knowledge of Elite Theory, Pluralist, functionalist and Weberian views on the distribution of power being offered.

In terms of evaluation, there was a tendency in this question to juxtapose different views of power and for the Marxist views to move out of focus. Some candidates spent most of the essay discussing other, perhaps more well-studied, views of power, particularly elite theory. Stronger candidates were able to explicitly discuss similarities and differences between these alternative theories and Marxist views, and thus scored highly for AO2b.

Common names: Marx, Miliband, Gramsci, Poulantzas, Althusser

Common concepts: ideology, false consciousness, direct and indirect rule, elites, RSA and ISA, hegemony, fixed sum and variable sum.

Question No. 12

This was the least popular question within this option and thus across the whole paper, and very few were seen. Given the nature of the question, there was the potential to credit a wide range of knowledge. However, some candidates presented detailed explanations of different ideologies, in a list-like structure, without specifically engaging with the question, which asked for explanations of the role of ideology. Stronger responses focused on the role of ideology in politics in contemporary society, including the notion that ideology is dead in contemporary politics, either as a point of evaluation as a viewpoint to consider.

Common names: Marx, Althusser, Burke, Bell, Fukuyama, Walby

Common concepts: Patriarchal ideology, Capitalist ideology, Conservatism, Anarchism, Liberalism

G674 Exploring Social Inequality and Difference

General Comments

As last year, the standards of achievement attained were good; candidates and centres are once again to be congratulated on their achievements.

The paper is designed to test candidates' knowledge and understanding of social inequality and difference, as well as sociological theory and methodology. The paper is synoptic and linked to the core themes of power, social inequality, socialisation, culture and identity. In addition the paper tests candidates' ability to interpret and evaluate sociological theory, research and evidence, especially through the analysis of a research case study.

In this session the source material was based upon a study of working class boys and educational success reported in the academic journal *Sociology*, published in 2011. The study was based in grammar schools in Northern Ireland and involved a methodology that employed analysis of qualitative data mainly gathered using focus group interviews and observation.

From the evidence of candidate responses, the source material and questions were easily understood and accessible to candidates of all abilities. The vast majority of candidates were able to respond to the questions appropriately and demonstrate positive achievement. The paper also differentiated successfully.

In Section A candidates are expected to show knowledge and understanding of different sociological perspectives or theories of research, for example feminist, positivist, interpretive and realist approaches, as well as research design and methods. This is achieved through the analysis and evaluation of the research strategy within the case study outlined in the source material.

In Section A, in order to evaluate the research strategy within the case study, candidates are expected to use a range of methodological concepts and perspectives. It is therefore essential that candidates are familiar with and able to apply some of the key sociological methodological concepts, including validity, reliability, representative, generalisable and replicable. Candidates should know these key concepts and have had opportunity to apply them in the evaluation of research case studies during their courses. Understanding positivist, interpretive, realist and feminist approaches to methodology is also important. Candidates should encounter a range of research studies and have the opportunity to critically evaluate their methodology during the course in order to prepare for this paper.

Candidates revealed a good knowledge and understanding of methodological concepts and were able to apply these to an analysis of the case study. They generally had a better understanding of focus group interviews than respondent validation.

In general, the compulsory questions on sociological research were answered well and there were some excellent responses that demonstrated high levels of knowledge and understanding of the role of respondent validation in research generally, and the use of focus group interviews to gather qualitative data in particular. It was pleasing to see how many candidates were aware of the different uses of respondent validation and could evaluate different forms of evidence by applying different theoretical perspectives in an informed way.

Many candidates were able to apply the case study to their responses very well, principally using the case study material as examples and relating methodological issues and concepts to the study of working class boys in schools. For example many candidates discussed the sensitivity of discussing personal experience of conflict and how a group environment might provide

support and encouragement to individuals in sharing their stories with the researcher. A number of candidates reflected upon the issues surrounding the impact of gender on the research process, noting that an adult female researcher was investigating young male respondents in a school context.

Use of sociological concepts generally improved this year; however knowledge of different methodological approaches could be better. Many candidates were able to apply knowledge of different approaches to methodology in their responses to the questions in Section A; however knowledge and understanding of interpretive approaches were generally better than those of other approaches. Candidates would benefit from a deeper understanding of feminist and realist approaches.

In Section B candidates are expected to show knowledge and understanding of substantive topics in Social Inequality and Difference and evaluate different theoretical perspectives, notably Functionalist, Marxist, neo-Marxist, Weberian, Post Modern and Feminist. In June 2015 candidates' choice of questions in Section B revealed a preference for the question on gender inequality as opposed to social class inequality.

The questions on both gender and social class were answered well. Candidates demonstrated good levels of knowledge and understanding of functionalist approaches to social class inequality. Many candidates had a good grasp of different functionalist writers; other approaches to social class inequality were used perceptively to evaluate and assess functionalist theory.

The questions on gender were answered particularly well, with many candidates demonstrating an excellent knowledge and understanding of different feminist explanations of gender inequality.

In section B candidates need to be encouraged to contrast and compare different sociological explanations and highlight strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. Unfortunately some candidates simply described and juxtaposed explanations rather than applying them in an analysis of the issue being discussed.

In general, candidates seemed to benefit from careful preparation for this examination by centres. They had clearly followed interesting, carefully organised courses that were effective in developing the skills to be tested. In addition, examination technique was generally very good.

Candidates had sufficient time for the tasks. The vast majority completed all of the questions within the time allocated. There were hardly any rubric errors.

As in previous years, to improve performance further candidates should be encouraged to:

- answer the question set and refer back to the question regularly; this especially helps candidates to demonstrate the skill of interpretation and application
- use the case study fully in their responses to both Questions 1 and 2
- use a variety of different forms of sociological evidence, which may be empirical studies, data, concepts, theory and contemporary examples
- refer to sociological concepts, studies and theory wherever relevant
- evaluate theories and research strategies by referring to both strengths and weaknesses
- avoid simple assertion, opinion and anecdotal evidence.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1

The majority of candidates answered this question reasonably well, revealing good knowledge and understanding of respondent validation within sociological research, drawing upon the information in the source material and their own background knowledge from across the Specification to illustrate their responses.

Most candidates understood that respondent validation usually takes place during the period of data collection when feedback is obtained from the participants about the accuracy of the data they have given to the researcher. The researcher's understanding and interpretation of the data is also checked. Many candidates were also aware of the role of respondent validation after the completion of a research project in checking the interpretation of the data as a whole and the research findings generally. Some candidates gave examples of past studies which had used respondent validation to support their responses.

Most candidates identified and described the following main uses of respondent validation:

- checking the accuracy of the recording of data e.g. from focus group interviews
- confirming that the data may be used in the research – gaining consent
- confirming that the description of attitudes, beliefs and values is an accurate representation
- verifying that interpretations of information gathered by researchers matches that of the respondents and are fair and free from bias/distortion
- reading drafts of research reports
- checking the validity of conclusions

Some candidates also discussed the role of respondent validation in:

- qualitative research about the experience, perspectives, understanding and meaning of people's lives and identity
- sensitive areas of research where the intention is to capture the detail of people's lives that reflects their own situation and experience e.g. vulnerable or deviant groups
- giving status to and valuing the contribution of the respondents to the research process, as in feminist approaches
- case studies
- democratic research processes
- promoting ethical research
- empowering the subjects of the research.

The best responses related their responses clearly and systematically to the source material, using the research by Nicola Ingram to illustrate their answers. Some candidates did not use the Source and inevitably restricted the marks that could be gained. Centres should stress the need to use both the Source and their own knowledge and understanding.

To reach the higher levels of response candidates needed to describe three or four uses of respondent validation, apply the source several times and locate the process within the debate between interpretive and positivist approaches to methodology. Some candidates also discussed feminist and realist approaches very well and applied them to the research on working class boys in school.

Unfortunately, a few candidates did not focus on *respondent validation* but discussed the uses, or strengths and weaknesses, of the specific methods in the case study. Similarly, whilst the question asked candidates to outline and explain the importance of respondent validation, some

evaluated the research method in the Source. The question is designed to test Knowledge and Understanding (AO1) and Interpretation and Application (AO2a), so material presented by candidates on evaluation is not credited.

Some candidates did not understand respondent validation and therefore described some aspects of research in general, introducing material that was tangential to the question. Only a very few candidates did not attempt the question at all.

Question 2

The majority of candidates answered this question very well, revealing a good knowledge and understanding of focus group interviews in sociological research, and related methodological issues, drawing upon the information in the source material and their own background knowledge to illustrate their responses.

Most candidates understood that focus group interviews are a qualitative method that usually collects data and evidence that is in-depth, detailed and descriptive, rather than numerical or quantitative data in a statistical form. The method usually involves gathering information about the experience of the subjects/actors from their point of view in small groups. Candidates often described the method as interviews in which questions are asked by a researcher in a group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members.

Many candidates were aware that focus groups provided research environments that were more natural than one-to-one interviews, thereby creating increased openness and rapport.

Candidates tended to locate focus group interviews within interpretive and feminist approaches and suggested that they were high in validity and low in reliability, and were often used to discover the meaning and subjective understanding of those being researched. The research is therefore usually small scale and at a micro-level.

Most candidates clearly discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the view that focus group interviews were the best way to study working class boys and educational success. In evaluation, candidates generally referred to methodological issues and concepts such as:

- the influence of method/ researcher on quality of data gathered and subsequent uses
- advantages and disadvantages of qualitative data, especially gathered through interviews in group settings
- interpretive, feminist and realist approaches
- objectivity and subjectivity
- sample size effects
- representativeness
- meanings and experiences
- empathy
- rapport
- reflexivity
- generalisability
- validity
- subject and researcher biases
- fitness for purpose
- the 'Hawthorne effect'
- social desirability
- researcher imposition.

Ethical issues were sometimes raised, for example of confidentiality and the potential impact on the lives of those studied, including raising sensitive issues and ensuring absence of harm, for

example from bullying in a school context. Many demonstrated an understanding of the issues facing sociologists gaining consent for and access to children for research purposes.

Many candidates also contrasted positivism to interpretive approaches to social research, showing skills of evaluation and analysis through this discussion.

The best responses related their responses clearly and systematically to the source material, using the research to illustrate their answers. Some candidates failed to use the Source and inevitably restricted the marks that could be gained. Centres should stress the need to use both the Source and their own knowledge and understanding.

Unfortunately a few candidates discussed other methods beyond the case study in the Source Material or contrasted focus group interviews with many other research methods in their answers. The question was focussed specifically on focus groups and so much of the material presented in this type of response, unless clearly related back to the central issue of the *'fitness for purpose'* of the target method tended not to be relevant and could not be credited.

Question 3

(a) The majority of candidates answered this question well. Candidates generally used their knowledge and understanding of patterns of social class inequality and disadvantage from different units within the specification, as well as the G674 unit itself. Most candidates correctly presented evidence about continuing social class inequality in the contemporary UK.

The best responses tended to present a range of recent evidence with some contemporary examples. Aspects of social life most often identified and discussed included:

- education
- employment
- income and wealth
- health and welfare
- housing
- political power
- patterns of crime and deviance
- portrayal within the media.

Candidates were expected to identify and describe a range of different types of sociological evidence and most included empirical studies, data, contemporary examples, concepts, and theoretical material in their responses.

Candidates were most likely to refer to the following sociological studies:

- Barron and Norris
- Willis
- Pakulski and Walters
- Bourdieu
- Westergaard and Resler.

Contemporary examples most often cited were:

- the increasing gap between rich and poor and the distribution of wealth
- recent patterns in educational achievement
- unemployment and work experience in the economic recession/crisis
- patterns of child poverty

- growing size of underclass
- impact of increased taxation and withdrawal of benefits
- changes in primary and secondary labour markets
- current patterns of health inequality
- current membership of parliament and directorships of companies by class background.

Candidates were most likely to outline empirical studies and make some reference to theoretical evidence. Some introduced relevant statistical data and contemporary examples to good effect. The most effective responses made appropriate use of all these types of sociological evidence.

Candidates gaining marks at the highest levels of response tended to describe social class inequalities in a range of different areas of social life, usually three or more, supported by several different types of evidence, including empirical studies, data, concepts, theory and contemporary examples.

Candidates at the higher levels of response revealed an excellent ability to interpret sociological knowledge and understanding and apply it to the issue. The material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related to the question.

(b) Candidates were expected to outline and assess the view that social class inequality is functional for society. The majority of candidates answered this question well. Most were able to describe functionalist explanations of social class inequality in some detail and apply these to the question.

The following concepts were often identified and discussed:

- rules
- norms
- shared values
- integration
- role models
- function
- organic analogy
- socialisation
- social system
- meritocracy
- role allocation and performance
- rewards
- functional prerequisites/necessities/importance
- consensus
- structure
- social order
- expressive and instrumental roles
- human capital.

Candidates tended to refer to functionalist and other writers such as:

- Durkheim
- Parsons
- Murdock
- Davis and Moore
- Tumin
- Merton

- Eisenstadt.

Alternative theoretical explanations of social stratification were usually explored in evaluation of functionalist approaches and/or juxtaposed, for example Marxist, neo-Marxist, Weberian, feminist and post modern. The impact on class differences of ethnicity, gender and age were sometimes compared or contrasted with class, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions.

Candidates evaluated functionalist explanations of class differences very well in many cases, presenting a range of strengths and/or weaknesses. Arguments included:

- emphasises social structure based on common norms and values
- sees social change as a process of development
- theory may be applied to many societies
- emphasizes importance of stability and harmony in patterns of inequality
- underemphasises social action in society
- underemphasises conflict, class and wealth in inequality, in comparison to Marxist approaches
- doesn't acknowledge the way other aspects of inequality may reinforce each other, e.g. age, ethnicity and gender
- neglects changing nature, fluidity and eclectic nature of culture and inequality in post modern society,

Comparison of alternative theoretical explanations was usually undertaken in evaluation. Some candidates simply described and juxtaposed different theoretical approaches. More effective responses used alternative approaches to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of functionalism, and each other, and also evaluated in a sustained and explicit way. The best responses also tended to conclude with a specific and clear assessment of functionalist and/or other explanations.

Candidates at the higher levels of response revealed an excellent ability to interpret sociological knowledge and understanding and apply it to an assessment of functionalist approaches to gender. The material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related to the question.

Question 4

(a) The majority of candidates answered this question well. Candidates generally used their knowledge and understanding of gender inequality from different units within the Specification, as well as the G674 unit itself. Most candidates focused upon the evidence for inequalities for both males and females. Some, however, tended simply to describe gender differences rather than focus on providing evidence.

Aspects of gender that were identified and discussed by many candidates tended to be:

- education and training
- employment and unemployment
- promotion and career opportunities
- income and wealth
- health and welfare
- power and control at work
- patterns of crime and deviance
- family position and relationships
- politics.

The following concepts were often identified and discussed:

- patriarchy
- status
- power
- social mobility
- stereotypical gender roles
- conjugal roles
- dual role
- socialisation
- glass ceiling
- dual labour market
- class and occupational structure
- reserve army
- human capital theory
- segregation of jobs
- marginalization
- social exclusion
- masculinities.

The sociological writers most often cited were:

- Oakley
- Benson
- Parsons
- Walby
- Pollert
- Abbott et al
- Hakim
- Barron and Norris
- Connell .

Candidates were most likely to make reference to empirical studies and outline some theoretical evidence. Some introduced relevant data and contemporary examples. The most effective responses made appropriate use of all these types of sociological evidence.

Candidates at the higher levels of response revealed an excellent ability to interpret sociological knowledge and understanding and apply it to the issue of continuing inequality. The material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related back to the question.

Some candidates made very good use of contemporary examples, which tended to include:

- recent patterns in educational achievement
- unemployment and work experience in the economic recession/crisis
- changes in the occupational structure
- differential impact of recession
- larger numbers of males in higher level occupational/political posts
- access to male dominated employment opportunities restricted for females and vice versa
- higher levels of male deviance and criminality in statistics
- patterns of health e.g. males life expectancy/health worse generally
- portrayal of gender in media becoming more diverse but still male dominated
- roles in the family
- incidence of poverty
- current membership of parliament and directorships of companies by class background.

(b) Candidates were expected to outline and assess the view that gender is the most important form of social inequality. The majority of candidates answered this question well. They were able to outline a variety of feminist perspectives in some detail and apply these to the question.

The following concepts were often identified and discussed:

- gender
- sexual division of labour
- sexism
- glass ceiling
- patriarchy
- vertical and horizontal segregation
- dual career
- triple systems
- human capital
- socialisation
- capitalism and social class
- status
- power
- ethnicity and race
- fragmentation
- cultural differences
- individualisation
- identity.

Candidates tended to refer to feminist and other writers such as:

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- Walby
- Firestone
- Millet
- Hartmann
- Oakley
- Abbott
- Mirza
- Hakim
- Marx
- Weber.

Gender differences in different aspects of social life were often used to illustrate answers, such as in education, employment, income and wealth, health and welfare, housing, political power, and patterns of crime and deviance. Alternative theoretical explanations of social stratification were usually explored in evaluation and/or juxtaposed, for example Marxist, neo-Marxist, Weberian, functionalist and postmodern. The impact on gender differences of ethnicity, class and age were sometimes compared or contrasted with gender, as well as the intersection/interrelationship of these dimensions.

Candidates evaluated feminist explanations of gender differences and the view that gender is the most important form of inequality very well in many cases, presenting a range of strengths and/or weaknesses. Arguments included:

- recognizes the role of male power and dominance in creating gender inequality
- values female contributions to societies, celebrates female cultures and recognises the role of women

- provides a theoretical basis for addressing gender inequalities
- helps to understand the linking of gender inequality across different aspects of social life – family, education, media, crime, etc.
- doesn't provide an explanation of the origins of patriarchy historically or socially
- the role of socialization and biological influences not highlighted sufficiently
- underestimates the importance of class, race, ethnicity and age in inequality
- tends to underestimate the importance of concepts like status and power in understanding inequalities
- underestimates the changing and fragmented nature of social and gender inequality, diversity and culture
- doesn't acknowledge the way class and other aspects of inequality may reinforce each other, e.g. race and gender.

Comparison of alternative theoretical explanations was usually undertaken in evaluation. Some candidates simply described and juxtaposed different theoretical approaches. More effective responses used alternative approaches to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of feminist perspectives, and each other, and also evaluated in a sustained and explicit way. The best responses also tended to conclude with a specific and clear assessment of the view that gender is the most important form of inequality.

Candidates at the higher levels of response revealed an excellent ability to interpret sociological knowledge and understanding and apply it to an assessment of the view that gender is the most important form of inequality. The material was clearly, explicitly and consistently related to the question.

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