



General Certificate of Secondary Education

Sociology 4190

41901

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General

Although this was the first examination of the new specification, with a different style of paper and questions, candidates responded very well, generally finding it accessible. This enabled them to really show what they knew about aspects of contemporary British society. Many candidates provided thoughtful, well-focused responses to the questions, and there were few scripts where questions were left unanswered. Indeed, some really excellent scripts were seen, demonstrating sound knowledge and understanding of social processes, structures and issues in modern multicultural Britain. There is clearly a lot of good quality sociology teaching and learning taking place and centres are to be congratulated for the part they have played in enabling so many candidates to successfully respond to the questions. Also of note was the very good quality of written communication, with many candidates using sociological terms adeptly and with precision in their responses to the extended questions.

The following are some areas for improvement that may benefit centres when giving advice to candidates:

- Candidates would benefit from ensuring that the information presented to the examiner is of relevance and clearly addresses the set question. Responses to Question 25 for example, tended to present material which described general gender relationships within **society** rather than focusing on relationships **within the home**.
- Candidates often failed to maximise their marks by not fully answering the question set, eg no reference to the 'how far' aspect of the 'mini-essay' Questions 16/17 and 24/25.
- Many of the stronger responses demonstrated candidates' ability to consider a variety of sociological concerns/different sociological explanations relating to the specific question set, presenting detailed, balanced and relevant sociological considerations, supporting the points made with good argument/evidence. However, on occasions, Marxism, functionalism and feminism were inappropriately applied, indicating that candidates really did not understand these perspectives. Alternatively, sometimes candidates provided commonsense 'teenager on the street' comments which lacked any reference to actual sociological evidence or sociological concepts.
- Occasionally rubric infringements were witnessed on this paper. A minority of candidates chose to ignore the instructions before Questions 16 and 24, which clearly state that candidates should only attempt one of the two extended writing questions for Topics 2 and 3. In all but the most exceptional of cases, this resulted in candidates offering weak answers to these questions in the time available.
- Some candidates appeared to lack knowledge and understanding of certain parts of the Studying Society element of the specification. The specification clearly points out that it is important that candidates are made aware of various sampling techniques and of any ethical issues which need to be considered when conducting sociological research. They should then be able to apply this knowledge and understanding to an exemplar sociological investigation.

Topic 1 – Studying Society

Question 01

The vast majority of candidates answered this question correctly. A few though gave the response of Art rather than Maths.

Question 02

Very few candidates were unable to identify the research method of observation as stated in the item.

Question 03

Many candidates concisely outlined an appropriate advantage **and** disadvantage. Some only gave an advantage, such as it provides insight into a group's behaviour in their natural setting, or just a disadvantage, citing the 'Hawthorne effect'. Notably few candidates wrote an unnecessarily long answer, which suggests that the majority of centres are correctly informing their candidates to match the length of their response to the marks available.

Question 04

Some candidates were able to clearly describe the difference between biological and sociological explanations, and provided appropriate examples to illustrate the difference between the biological idea of sex and the sociological idea of gender. Others though did not develop their answer beyond simply stating that boys are treated differently when compared to girls in a family. Quite a few candidates had difficulty exploring the biological focus of anatomical/physiological sex differences between males and females.

Question 05

Many candidates were able to give examples of gender socialisation, but few managed to make reference to both cultural **and** socialisation aspects. In general there appeared to be an over-reliance on the item from weaker candidates. Stronger responses provided excellent supporting examples from which to show their good understanding.

Question 06

Quite a few candidates did not know what a longitudinal study was. Of those that did, few explained how a longitudinal study would be useful for researching into the socialisation of boys and girls in society. However, there were some good responses from those candidates who knew what a longitudinal study was and were aware of its usefulness, citing how you could see development over time and the effects that certain agents of socialisation would have.

Question 07

A significant amount of candidates left this blank, or wrote about a **research** method rather than a form of **sampling**. Few were able to offer clear sociological understanding. This was surprising, given that methodology forms a core part of the specification.

Question 08

Disappointing responses to this question were seen from many candidates, despite a similar question included in the specimen paper and the clear reference to ethical issues in the specification. Some candidates confused ethical issues with ethnic issues and consequently failed to achieve any marks. However, some candidates were able to offer identification, with some explanation. Most candidates achieved marks through reference to the principle of privacy. Few gave a clear explanation linked to the issue under investigation.

Question 09

This question was answered more successfully. Most candidates were able to gain two marks for a basic statement about their selected primary method, and some went further and compared their selected primary method with another in terms of advantages/disadvantages. However, rarely did answers go further than this; the best commented on such considerations as validity/reliability or in terms of qualitative/quantitative data collection. Few candidates related their answer to the issue under investigation.

Topic 2 – Education**Question 10**

The vast majority of candidates were able to identify the overall increasing trend.

Question 11

This question posed few problems for candidates, with virtually all providing the correct answer of 31.

Question 12

Almost all candidates were able to identify at least one suitable reason, either in favour of sending a child to a particular school, or in not sending a child to a particular school. Some candidates got somewhat carried away and wrote unnecessarily long answers for this question worth just two marks. Candidates would be wise to consider the relationship between the time they allocate to each question and the marks available.

Question 13

Pleasingly, there were many full answers to this question, with candidates generally explaining that it was not part of the National Curriculum, but formed part of socialisation, with good examples provided. However, a significant minority did not attempt this question, suggesting they were unfamiliar with this key sociological concept.

Question 14

Rather surprisingly, some candidates struggled to provide an answer to this question. However, most were able to give at least a partial description and often gave some explanation by saying how the child improved. Some candidates unfortunately did not do what the question asked, and identified more than one way without explaining either fully.

Question 15

Many excellent answers were seen, which were thorough and thoughtfully constructed. The majority of candidates chose to focus on Ofsted as the monitoring process and developed their response to include a clear explanation of the effects on the school being monitored.

Question 16

This was the least popular of the Topic 2 options. Knowledge of actual educational reforms was very patchy. Stronger responses often used the National Curriculum as their stated reform and tended to develop this in terms of it being responsible for gender differences in performance, some candidates then went further with updated knowledge to include the demise of coursework in certain subjects and how this has led to an improvement in the educational attainment of boys. Few responses included Ofsted/league tables/SATs and the development of a 'market' in education, Academies, Action Zones, etc. As ever, candidates displayed an inaccurate sense of history, so 'recent' reforms included the Butler Act, the 11+ or its demise, the development of free education, raising of the school leaving age and the introduction of comprehensives. Even fewer candidates then moved onto the next step of assessing the reform/s in terms of assisting the achievement of all pupils. Some candidates did develop this by referencing continued differences in performance by some groups, eg ethnic groups/class differences, and some candidates also touched on the many other factors which might also be included when accounting for success/failure in educational performance.

Question 17

The vast majority of candidates opted for this question and many provided good, detailed answers. Most candidates stuck to the tried and tested way of answering this type of question by 'on the one hand' vs 'on the other..' generally agreeing that home life strongly influenced poor educational performance, in some instances with very concerned portrayals of bad parenting and child neglect. Many candidates saw this question in clear 'class' terms and just explained the good and bad aspects of home background and performance. Those candidates that moved the debate on usually did so by developing some in-school factors, but mainly at the simple level of teacher influence. Rare were responses which indicated the breadth of factors which sociologists have tried to take into account when considering explanations of differential educational performance – quality of resources in a school/streaming-setting/labelling/gender/ethnicity, etc. Those candidates attempting to use supporting sociological evidence often did so very successfully.

Topic 3 – Families**Question 18**

The vast majority correctly answered 2006, although a few put 'yes' or 'no'.

Question 19

Almost all candidates were able to correctly identify that an incident was reported every minute.

Question 20

Most candidates were able to gain a mark by simply identifying 'divorce' as a reason. Many misread this question as referring to single **parent** rather than **person** and so tended to miss two marks by describing teenage pregnancies/single mums.

Question 21

Many candidates could offer a partial explanation of what constitutes an extended family. Some provided fuller answers, explaining both horizontal and vertical types, and a few even mentioned 'modified extended families'. Most candidates stated that the relatives lived in the household alongside the nuclear family. Some described 'reconstituted families'.

Question 22

There were some largely descriptive accounts of the variety of help that grandparents might provide. More considered responses explained clearly how grandparents could release parents from various pressures and many candidates explained how they provided an additional form of socialisation, cultural and human support as well as the strictly financial. Many candidates identified more than one way, but did not develop an explanation clearly.

Question 23

Most candidates just stated 'benefits' without reference to any specific governmental assistance for lone parent families. Only a few informed candidates were able to cite government programmes and schemes like Sure Start which provide support with child care, or financial help through child tax credits, housing costs and the introduction of 'baby bonds'. Many candidates failed to achieve full marks because they did not clearly explain how the assistance addressed the needs of the lone parent. Some offered several types of government assistance without explaining one fully.

Question 24

Some excellent, detailed responses were presented. Many candidates began by defining what was meant by a 'nuclear family', offering a textbook 'functionalist' description and explaining that this was often seen as the 'norm' by the media – the 'cereal packet family' – and society in general, as a kind of 'ideal type'. Some candidates even used statistics to indicate the popularity of the nuclear family. Many then offered the rise of other forms of family type to indicate diversity and decline of the nuclear family as traditionally defined. These candidates referenced the increasing numbers of lone parent families, reconstituted/step families, variations of extended families, differences in terms of class and/or ethnic groups – all part of a changing society with no one family pattern dominant. Some candidates then concluded that despite all of the above, many still hold onto the image of the nuclear family as the 'ideal' and referenced the new government approach to try to bolster the nuclear family as part of its family policy. Weaker candidates just offered descriptive pieces and a small minority of candidates interpreted the question as norms within the family.

Question 25

This was a more popular choice of the Topic 3 option questions and was generally attempted successfully by candidates. However, some discussed gender inequalities within society and tended to reference Equal Pay/Sex Discrimination Act and 'glass ceiling' as well as the increased independence of women rather than analysing relationships about the home.

Some candidates described changing conjugal roles with some success in terms of inequality, with the 'new man' reality/myth being considered. Reference was occasionally made to Young and Willmott, and also Oakley with a few candidates even referring to more recent sociological research and feminist accounts of the dual burden/triple shift. Very few considered power relationships despite the focus provided by the source material. Few candidates saw differences as a consequence of cohabitation rather than marriage, and the changes brought about as a consequence of career considerations for partners. Fewer considered in detail the changing and dichotomous relationships between children and parents – more 'democratic' yet dependent for longer.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html) page of the AQA Website: <http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html>