



General Certificate of Secondary Education

Sociology 4190

41901

Report on the Examination

2011 examination – January series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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General

This was the second examination series for this paper of the new specification and a wide range of candidate responses were seen. In comparison with the June examination series, fewer high quality papers were seen by examiners. This may be due to the fact that some candidates have just embarked upon sociology, only being a few months into their GCSE course. Nonetheless, some really excellent scripts were seen. Clearly, much fine sociology teaching and learning has been taking place, and these centres are to be congratulated for the part they have played in enabling so many candidates to successfully respond to the questions.

There were a significant number of incomplete scripts. Some candidates apparently lacked knowledge of certain aspects of the Short Course specification; others lost marks due to poor time management. On a more positive note, it was pleasing to see more candidates offering a 'plan' for their extended 'mini-essay' questions. However, these were of varying quality, with some plans clearly indicating a distinct lack of knowledge of the key issues required by the set question.

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

- Candidates will benefit from ensuring that the information presented is of relevance and clearly addresses the particular question. Certain responses to question 15, for example, tended to lack knowledge of current educational reforms.
- Candidates often failed to maximise their marks by not fully answering the question set. For example, no reference being made to the 'how far' aspect of the twelve mark questions 16/17, 24/25.
- When responding to the 'mini-essay' questions which, of course, demand longer responses in order to achieve a significant amount of marks, many of the stronger candidates demonstrated the ability to consider a variety of sociological concerns/different sociological explanations relating to the specific question set. The best candidates presented detailed, balanced and relevant sociological considerations, supporting the points made with good argument/evidence. However, Marxism, functionalism and, indeed, feminism were sometimes inappropriately applied to a question, indicating that candidates had failed to understand these perspectives. Some candidates also provided anecdotal comments which lacked any reference to actual sociological evidence or sociological concepts.
- A limited number of rubric infringements were witnessed on this paper, although less than in the first series. 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 'mini-essay' questions for topics 2 and 3. In the vast majority of cases, this resulted in candidates offering weak answers to these questions in the time available.
- Some candidates did not plan their use of time well enough, leaving insufficient time to complete question 24 or 25. Those candidates who ran into time management issues in their last topic typically wrote at excessive length in the first two topics on questions worth comparatively few marks, occasionally compounding the issue by copying out the questions as well, or including irrelevant information.
- A significant number of candidates appeared to lack knowledge and understanding of certain parts of the Studying Society content of the specification. Questions 07-09 were often poorly answered, with candidates displaying a general lack of knowledge of research issues, as well as not focusing on the context/research topic they had been asked to consider. Centres are encouraged to invest more time in preparing candidates for this element of the specification.

Topic 1 – Studying Society

Question 01

The vast majority of candidates answered this correctly, although a few identified an incorrect percentage.

Question 02

Most candidates were able to identify the research method (interviews) as stated in the Item. However, a significant minority incorrectly identified *sample* as the method used by the sociologist.

Question 03

Many good answers were witnessed, offering both an appropriate advantage and disadvantage of their identified method. Some unnecessarily long answers were seen, and centres are advised to inform their students that excessively long descriptions are not required for questions worth just two marks – one or two succinct sentences will suffice.

Question 04

Few candidates were able to gain full marks for this question. Many candidates offered a partial description of the way they *imagined* sociologists would study the family, but the majority struggled to compare this with how journalists might investigate families.

Question 05

The majority of candidates answered this question well. Many were able to provide very full explanations about the sharing of tasks in the home by couples.

Question 06

Quite a few candidates seemed to be unfamiliar with the term 'primary research'. However, many were able to reference experiencing things 'first hand' if undertaking an observation, or 'in depth' information from interviews. However, most ignored the requirement to link their explanation to the topic.

Question 07

Considerable centre variation was demonstrated in the responses to this particular question. A few centres had almost all candidates guessing what a pilot study is or leaving this question blank. Some had almost all candidates able to identify and explain 'testing' or 'trailing' the research method and many continued to develop this in terms of being able to amend/adjust the research device prior to the full research taking place. However, very few linked this to the topic – 'this investigation'.

Question 08

There were many disappointing responses to this question, despite clear reference to ethical issues in the specification. Some candidates confused ethical issues with ethnic issues and consequently failed to achieve marks. Other candidates, though, were able to provide very full answers in terms of anonymity/privacy/confidentiality, with 'guarantees' being given/consent forms being used/full information about the nature of the research being explained to participants. Some did reference the context, but many did not.

Question 09

A minority of candidates compared **two** secondary sources. Those that did tended to ignore the research topic. Some candidates simply described sources, or offered a simple statement giving an advantage of **one** source, eg official statistics being best because they were up to date, with no comparison. Weaker responses described primary sources, for example questionnaires. Indeed, it was surprising how many candidates answered this question in relation to primary data and not secondary data.

Topic 2 – Education**Question 10**

A few candidates obtained the mark by describing what they saw in the cartoon in Item D. Some ignored the stimulus material and gave a definition of streaming. A few gave long, elaborate answers to this question. Candidates would be wise to remember that the time allocated to each question should depend upon the marks available for each.

Question 11

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

Question 12

Most candidates were able to gain two marks by correctly identifying two ways, usually by suggesting a negative and a positive way. Some used two negative ways in terms of behaviour and attitude. Again, some answers were far longer and offered more detail than necessary for two marks.

Question 13

Many responses described what labelling was and offered an example by way of explanation. A few candidates gave a sufficiently clear explanation to gain 4 marks.

Question 14

Many solid and varied answers were offered by candidates, ranging from 'after-school revision/enhancement provision' to 'one-to-one tuition'. A large number of candidates picked up on the words 'can try' in the question and so there were many variations on the theme of 'offering incentives', some based on real examples. However well described these were, many candidates only gave a simple explanation, relating to how pupil performance was improved.

Question 15

Popular reforms referenced included the National Curriculum, the introduction of attainment testing (SATS), Educational Maintenance allowance, Curriculum 2000 and Ofsted inspections. Most of these were sufficiently well enough described to gain two marks. The explanations were less developed, although many of the candidates using EMA as their example seemed more able to offer a clear explanation of how it may/may not have increased educational opportunities than those using different examples of reforms.

A number of candidates had a somewhat distorted sense of what happened during the last 25 years, with reference to the Butler Act or comprehensive schooling.

Question 16

The majority of candidates opted for this question, with many limiting their response to outlining some effects of streaming/setting, some stating how it might benefit certain pupils, and the negative effects on others. Weaker responses used the term 'grouping' to refer to a variety of 'groups' such as 'peer group' influences, or gender/class/race based groups.

Some candidates ignored the question set and launched into 'other factors' shaping performance. A small number of candidates considered a range of other 'in-school' and/or 'out-of-school' factors influencing educational performance, but it was disappointing to see so few of these.

Question 17

A less popular question with candidates, but, in general, those answering tended to offer more supporting evidence. Many candidates offered a contrast between the 'functionalist' view – that education was designed specifically to 'fit' people in society as part of secondary socialisation, and this was its main 'function' – and the 'Marxist' position, that it was purely geared to provide for the economic need of capitalism.

There was wide variation in the degree of sophistication of these responses; some just managing to reach the 7-9 band, and a few producing really excellent answers.

Topic 3 – Families

Question 18

The vast majority of candidates correctly answered 1972, although a few answered 'yes' or 1971.

Question 19

Almost all candidates were able to correctly identify a decreasing trend, although a few candidates described the data rather than stating the trend.

Question 20

Most candidates were able to identify at least one reason, stating 'more women want to spend time in a career before marrying later'. Some, however, misread this question, and gave reasons why people were not getting married at all.

Question 21

Many candidates provided detailed and accurate responses as to what constitutes a traditional nuclear family, although certain answers lacked sufficient clarity in order to be awarded 4 marks.

Question 22

Very mixed responses were presented. Some candidates were able to provide a detailed description of a consequence in terms of loss of contact with children and the subsequent emotional effects. Some struggled to go beyond a basic 'he won't have anyone to wash his clothes and so will be depressed' answer. Some focused on the effects on the children or wife rather than the husband.

Question 23

Only a few strong responses to this question were witnessed. Candidates struggled to describe an appropriate change and to offer more than a simple explanation of why it happened. Many chose to write about different types of families.

Question 24

Somewhat surprisingly, candidates in general provided weak responses to this question. Only a few explained that there were alternative views: that cohabitation was seen by some as a 'trial' marriage; that many divorced people re-married; that different groups had strong attitudes towards marriage, including various ethnic minorities.

More considered responses discussed the declining influence of the church, the fear of divorce, the increased popularity of lone parenthood rather than marriage, the exorbitant costs of weddings, as well as simply changing attitudes towards marriage, all leading to a big decline in marriage.

Question 25

This was the more popular choice of the topic 3 option questions and was generally tackled better by candidates than question 24. Many candidates offered a 'functionalist' view on how 'appropriate' the traditional nuclear family is for raising children, and left the debate there. Some candidates simply described other forms of family, or explained that they existed, whereas others offered the New Right as further support for the traditionalist view. More detailed responses attempted to offer 'Marxist' views, some successfully indicating how this was different from the functionalist approach and hinted at 'extent'. Stronger responses offered some 'feminist' criticisms of the 'traditional' nuclear family and some referenced the 'dark side' with a Leach, Laing, and Cooper-type criticism.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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